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The Supernatural

Or

Fellowship With God

By
DAVID A. MURRAY, D. D.
Author of "Christian Faith and the New Psychology," etc.

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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To the memory of
My Wife's Father

THOMAS DOVE FOSTER

Who while conducting a large business on Christian principles was also able, in public service, in municipal reform, in Society, in the Church, and in all his daily personal contact with men, to demonstrate that a close walk of Fellowship with God is the surest source of both Character and Social Service,

This book is affectionately inscribed

Preface

DIFFERENT ages have had different religious problems. Once it was the question of Monotheism. In the early Christian centuries it was the Person of Christ. At the Reformation it was the immediate access of the soul to God. To-day the great contest seems to be along the line of Naturalism.

Science in the past century and a half has made enormous advances throughout the whole range of secular knowledge. It has demanded universal domain. Religion has refused to be included on the same plane as other knowledge, and science has retaliated by either ignoring it or denying its validity. Especially have its supernatural postulates been most confidently challenged.

What will be the outcome? Can religion again make good its ancient isolation in a world with which science has nothing to do? Will science succeed in annihilating belief in the supernatural, and be able without it to build up in its own domain a satisfactory religion drawn entirely from natural sources?

Or will it be possible in some way to give religion, just as it is, with all its supernatural features intact, a recognized standing and established place in the world of scientific thought? Can it be coördinated in its

present form with all the rest of the discovered universe facts in one unified consistent system ?

It is confronting that situation that the following studies have taken up this most difficult question of the place of the supernatural in religion and in the universe scheme.

D. A. M.

Tsu, Ise, Japan.

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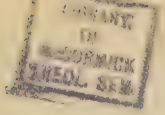
PART I

Problems



I

THE BOOK

CHRISTIANITY has sometimes been called The Religion of a Book. While it is more than that, the designation is not entirely inappropriate. A book, the Bible, has always had a supreme place in the Christian system and been considered the authoritative source of its teaching. The expression "To believe the Bible" has often, not inaptly, been used as the equivalent of being a Christian.

The Bible is still the most widely read book of all literature, and recent years have seen a distinct revival in its study and esteem. Yet we cannot fail to notice a decided change in the nature of that esteem, and in the place it holds in men's hearts.

A generation ago our fathers studied the book with reverence as "The Word of God," the food of the soul, "The only infallible rule of faith and practice." To-day, with all our reviving appreciation, we approach the Book with a critical reserve. It is to us a book of great value and absorbing interest. It has a most honoured place on the shelf of great ethical and literary classics. But all questions as to its authority or divinity we rather prefer not to have raised.

Several causes have contributed to remove the old halo from the Book. The scientific spirit of the age,

the work of the Higher Criticism, the study of Comparative Religion, together with a natural reaction from a too mystical, if not mechanical, conception of its origin, have all had their influence.

Another thing that has contributed much to this result is the fact that the attention of the Christian men of this generation is being so centered on Social Service that we do not feel nearly as much concern as our fathers did about distinctly divine things.

Unquestionably this call of Social Service marks the highest level of ethical purpose the Church has yet attained. And yet life is so large, and its many parts so interdependent, that it is never safe to enshrine any one particular part as the whole and ignore all others. It might always be possible that there was a something else which was as necessary to this social activity as the root is to the flower,—something from which it draws its origin and without which it could not permanently exist.

Still we cannot lightly regard any spontaneous and universal tendency. The survival of the fittest is the wise law of nature. If the Bible really is not entitled to the old place of supreme religious guide, if it has not the qualifications to satisfy the religious needs of men, and if it cannot prove its claim to divine authority, we will have to acquiesce and see it dethroned and superseded, no matter how painful it may be to tear up the roots of old affections and associations.

But so much is at stake that before we finally rest in such a drastic change it will not be unreasonable to permit still another sympathetic examination, to see if

possibly the fault may not lie, after all, in our misinterpretations and misunderstandings, and if the old Book which has brought comfort and spiritual strength to so many generations of our fathers may not still, when rightly understood, continue to come to us as the voice of God pointing the way of Eternal Life.

The Burden of the Supernatural

When we take up the Bible for study we are immediately met by the great question of the Supernatural. The whole message of the Bible, as it has come to us and as it has had such influence in the world, is a distinct assertion of the Supernatural.

It is not merely that we find accounts of miracles in the Bible history. That is not an unusual feature in very old records. And it is not only that these miracles are so numerous and such a fundamental feature of the narratives that it has been found impossible to successfully remove them without destroying all the meaning and value of the narratives themselves. It is more than that. The very essence of our religion is a relation to the unseen God which is distinctly supernatural. The central object of our religious trust is the Jesus Christ which the Book portrays, and that Christ, though there have been technical discussions as to His actual deity, has in the past always been considered by all Christians to be a supernatural person. And, more fundamental still, the very fact of any real revelation being made by God at all in any form or by any means is a distinctly supernatural matter, and so indeed is any real communication with Him in prayer or worship.

The whole trend of thought to-day, however, seems to be distinctly unfriendly to any suggestion of the supernatural. The scientific spirit of the times makes a peremptory challenge of everything that has any element of the supernatural in it. Such an exceedingly wide range of facts has been brought under the domain of explainable cause and effect that men are disposed to consider the thesis proved that everything belongs in that domain, and nothing is to be received as fact that cannot be so classified.

Whatever our own belief or wish in the matter, we have to recognize that the popular feeling is strongly against the supernatural. Such an account is now no longer received on the same testimony that would substantiate any ordinary event. It is even claimed by some that the one fact of an alleged event being supernatural is sufficient to invalidate any possible amount of testimony that could be brought to prove its occurrence.

But the Bible, as a historical phenomenon to be studied, is a book of the supernatural. The Bible which has had such a hold on men's minds, and which has had such enormous influence to lift up the world and make men and society better, has been the Bible accepted in the form we have it now, with its supernatural incidents and with the traditional estimate of its supernatural character. It is as a supernatural Bible, recording supernatural events, that it has had this power, and it is precisely the belief of its supernaturalness which has been the main thing that has given it this power and influence.

Historically it has not been appreciation of the intrinsic value of the teaching and of the high excellence of the ethical standards, which has given the Book its great power, so much as rather the firm belief that it is from God and that it gives us an immediate touch with God. It would be, to say the least, very disquieting to our moral instincts to be compelled to believe that a falsehood and delusion had been the cause of such preëminent moral benefit and uplift in the world.

As we examine the path of progress in the past we find that it has been by evolution rather than by revolution. We are prepared to expect evolution, expansion and clarification in our views as to God's personal relations and communications to men, but it would be drastic revolution to have to believe that no revelations of any kind have ever occurred at all.

Certainly, then, this question of the supernatural is a most pressing question and one that is vital in our whole religious situation. It is a question that will confront us all through our study of the Bible. For the supernatural is not merely an incident in the Bible and Christian system. It is not merely a tint or auxiliary figure in the picture but it is the main subject of the picture itself. It is not something that can be easily expunged or explained away, for it is the distinctive texture of the Book and the fundamental basis of the whole system.

Before making any direct study of the Bible text, then, it will be necessary to make a somewhat thorough inquiry into this whole question of the supernatural, both as to its place in religion and as to its possible relation to science and the whole world of evolution.

If we find that it is positively declared impossible by science, and especially if we find that it is not only unnecessary but incompatible with the interests of religion, that must end the inquiry for us.

But if we find, on the other hand, that science has really nothing positive to say against it, and that it is not only compatible with the highest interpretation of religion, but is a fundamental and indispensable postulate of all religion, then that will not only open the way for a detailed study of the supernatural in the Bible, but will make that investigation and study a matter of absorbing interest and importance.

The first matter, then, for us to consider is this problem of the validity of the supernatural. Must everything supernatural in our religion and in the Bible be necessarily rejected as impossible of belief, and must our whole attitude and estimate be recast to fit that view, even though,—as inevitably it must,—it should reduce the Book to a rather questionable fiction and require an entire reconstruction of the grounds, and even the substance, of our religious belief?

Or, on the other hand, is it still reasonable to consider some or all of the supernatural in the Book as true? Can we reasonably receive the Book and the religion it teaches as containing in a literal and real sense a revelation of God? May our Christian religion, with its supernatural Book, its supernatural Christ and its supernatural salvation still be believed, and still continue to bring to us the same peace, strength and heart comfort as it has to our fathers for so many generations?

II

DEFINITION

WHAT do we mean by "The Supernatural"? While the term is one in very familiar use there is more or less indefiniteness as to its precise meaning. It will be important to have a precise definition if we are to discuss the supernatural in the Bible.

There are various definitions that merely look at the strangeness of the events alleged, or that treat them as though they were to be considered as events occurring without any adequate cause. We may pass all such definitions by as not pertinent to our inquiry.

The most obvious definition is that which grows out of the etymology of the word. There is a range of events that are usually called natural events. Anything different from or outside of that range of events would be called "Supernatural." One objection to this is that it is a negative definition. A definition should be positive, describing a thing by what it is rather than by what it is not.

Very often the term is used to denote that an event was directly caused by God, in distinction from ordinary events that are caused by natural law. But, as Christians, we believe that all natural events are entirely the work of God just as truly as the supernatural. If however we recognize this and say that God provided

for one great system of cause and effect which we call Natural Law, and any things that He does which are not included in that would be called Supernatural, it would be more nearly an adequate definition, but yet this too would be unsatisfactory in several respects.

It is not easy or possible often to decide positively whether a given occurrence would come inside or outside the working of natural law. Many things reported in the Bible that once would have been considered outside of the province of natural law are now known to be easily producible entirely within the working of natural agencies. At one time all visions were considered to be certainly of that character. We now know that such phenomena can be produced altogether subjectively and by purely natural causes.

All the wonderful events narrated as occurring in connection with the migration of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan were once looked upon as the very types of the supernatural. We now consider that the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14 : 21 ff.) and of the Jordan (Josh. 3 : 14–17), the fall of the walls of Jericho (Josh. 6 : 20), many of the plagues in Egypt (Ex. 7–10) and various other things, might possibly all have been produced by the normal working of natural agencies. And yet there are imperative reasons for putting these events into the same classification as all the other events to which the name Supernatural is applied. They are preëminently referred to in the after record as examples of God's special interposition and favour, and they could have no legitimate religious value or significance otherwise.

Our definition of natural law is a very unstable and unsatisfactory one. Very commonly it depends chiefly upon frequency and regularity of occurrence. Especially is that true with those that hold that the efficiency behind all causation comes ultimately from God.

For instance, we would say that it was a recognized part of natural law that Life can beget life. We say so because it is a familiar and frequent phenomenon. But suppose that in all history there had only been one single case where a parent had begotten offspring and life had begotten life. Or suppose we were considering the very first of the long series of instances in which this has taken place, for everything must have a first instance. According to our assumed canons we must unquestionably consider that sole, or that first, instance an instance of the supernatural.

Suppose on the other hand after a while it should come to be the regular and usual order of occurrence that after a man died, and his body entirely dissolved away, at the end of a short interval his soul should somehow construct for itself a new body, and he would go on living in the world again the same as before. Such a state of affairs is at least conceivable, and it is much more inherently probable even now than a few billion years ago it was that such a phenomenon as life should appear and one life be able to beget another. But if that were a thing that was constantly happening we would say just as unquestionably that Resurrection was an ordinary feature of natural law.

Now if all things act as they do because God has constituted them to do so, we can form no certain

prejudgment as to what order of things He may choose to make occur frequently in the future, and so, the first time any species of event occurs we have no way to judge whether it must be called a natural or a supernatural event. There is no intrinsic quality by which one event must be classified as natural and another as supernatural. Any division we make must be entirely dependent upon the lottery of our conjecture as to what God intends to do in the future.

Reconciling Theories

With this in mind it might not unreasonably be claimed that all things that occur, whether in continuous series or singly and unique, might be plausibly called Natural just because they are parts of the one prearranged plan and purpose of God. If any miracle did really occur at any time it therein became and was proved to be a part of natural law just as much as anything else is. God's purpose must be consistent, unified and perfectly articulated, whether we see it or not, and so one thing just as legitimate and necessary a part of it as any other,—the water changed to wine or five loaves multiplied by the word of Jesus just as much as the similar change consummated in the branches of the vine or stalks of wheat in the field, provided these things actually occurred. And so with a legitimate use of the word "Natural" we might classify everything of any kind that actually occurs as natural just because it does occur and is thereby shown to be a necessary part of the one universal prearranged plan.

There is some disposition among a certain group of

apologists to resolve all the miracles in the Bible along some such line as that and thus get rid of the burden of the supernatural entirely. In one sense this is quite plausible. It is quite possible to subsume all things that actually occur, even the most unusual, under the same category and demand that it be called natural law. For every kind of event there must have once been a first time that it occurred, when it too would have been unique and unusual. What better conception of Natural than to classify as such all that is contained in the one grand, consistent plan of God, whether the event in question occurs only once or occurs many millions of times? In this way it would be possible to claim that the Bible miracles are not supernatural or interruptions of natural law at all.

But this does not, unfortunately, remove any of the real difficulty after all. We have indeed gotten rid of the word "Supernatural" and are relieved of the stigma of an unwelcome term, but that is all, and the fact of specialness is there just as much as before. These so-called miracles must certainly have been produced by a different order of agencies or in a different way from that in which all ordinary events are produced. The use or non use of a word makes no difference. It is just as embarrassing to try to explain why God departed from the order of agencies which He had found suitable and sufficient in all the rest of the upward process and brought in special acts or special agencies, no matter whether we call all natural or whether we call one order of agencies natural and the other supernatural.

It does not comport with our idea of God's calm,

competent consistency to suppose that He would work in that way. It is not the question whether God was concerned in one kind of agencies more than in the other, nor the question whether He could not if He chose change and use new agencies instead of the old agencies He had used to produce all other events. The question is, Would He do so? What would be gained by this inconsistency and extra trouble? Whatever difficulty there is it is just as great whether we call all natural or whether we call part natural and the rest supernatural. It is merely a change of name and no change in the fact of specialness.

There is another way that some seek to escape the charge of supernaturalness. We know that many diseases can be healed by what is called mental healing, hypnotism and other similar ways. Science can now do easily many things that two thousand years ago would have been counted superlatively miraculous. It is a fair, logical extension to suppose that many things that we now would consider impossible or miraculous, science will be able to do as easily at some future time.

If our science were only perfect every one of these wonderful events recorded in the Bible would be as easy to produce by any of us as it is now to produce hypnotic phenomena or send wireless telegrams. There was no interruption of natural law and no new agency used in those events, but merely through our ignorance we have not yet become familiar with and able to use the natural agencies, always in existence, which are adapted to produce those effects.

While there is a certain measure of plausibility about this theory, and while it does not rid of the supernatural entirely, yet on the other hand it would really destroy the value of the Book and the incidents entirely, and be fatal to the whole cause. To say that the miracles of Christ and the apostles were of that character would be to say that they were merely *works of magic.* That is precisely what all magic is. In the occult, miraculous sense in which the term is commonly conceived, of course there is no such thing as magic. All real events that have been believed and classed as magic have been merely events produced in ways and by means that the spectators did not understand.

In the early centuries there were quite a number of men, of whom Simon Magus is an example (Acts 8 : 9–24), who did these magical acts, or acts which the spectators could not understand, and who made use of them to accredit some religious system which they taught. On this theory Christ and His apostles were on precisely the same level with these men, and not different from them in any respect. In both cases equally they used a system of deception to accredit a religious system.

For it cannot be denied that it would have been deception. Down to the present day the whole Church has given decisive value to these alleged supernatural phenomena as proof that the Christian religion is of God. Moreover Christ Himself distinctly appealed to them as proof of that claim (Luke 7 : 20–23 ; John 5 : 36 ; 10 : 25, etc.). This then would have been a case of the most serious kind of deception, and Christ the

most serious kind of a deceiver if, after all, His works were merely works of magic and not special divine acts.

Real Significance of the Supernatural in the Bible

We shall not here attempt to make use of any of these short cuts to a solution of the difficulty. We shall fully assume that there are recorded in the Bible events that are special, and that are fundamentally different from the ordinary events which we call Nature, —events *that could not be produced by any causes now available to men or spontaneously in operation now.* We shall, however, prefer not to define them by saying that they are not natural, or telling what they are not, but will try to find some positive characteristics by which we can define them.

One thing, however, it will be very important to bear in mind, namely, that we are not here proposing to consider theoretically the whole abstract question of the supernatural in general, but are seeking to examine a very concrete, limited group of incidents recorded in one definite book, the Bible. It is only of that group of incidents that we are seeking to make a definition.

If we examine the supernatural events recorded in the Bible we shall find that they are all events or acts produced by God personally for the specific benefit of some person or restricted group. A distinctive feature of all of them is their *personal nature* and *restricted application.*

In the domain of nature God does acts,—or, what is the same thing, establishes laws and forces,—that are

universal in their application. They affect everything everywhere that is suited to be affected by them. These acts are not so, but are done specifically to some one person or group alone. They all have that peculiar quality which in our relations with one another we call Personal, that is they appeal to the consciousness of the individual as acts intentionally designed for him specifically. Of course the works of nature do not do so.

All the other operations and agencies that God has instigated are continuous and permanent, operating invariably whenever the given conditions are present. These acts do not have such universal automatic repetition, but are narrowed down and intentionally restricted to one specific case, and only at the one given time. They are no more truly acts of God than natural acts are, but they are singular, personal and individual. That is their distinctive feature.

To illustrate :—we say that it is the nature of fire to burn. If God made all materials, energies and laws, ordinary burning of fire is God acting. It always and invariably burns when the suitable material is in contact with it. That is nature. Now we could conceivably imagine God some time so altering things by a special act that fire would no longer burn, or would not burn during a given period, and that could be called a supernatural act, perhaps, though there are no acts at all of that character or that class in this group of Bible incidents which we are examining. But again on the other hand we could conceive that some time when certain persons to whom God wished to show a personal favour were thrown into the fire, God, in order

to save them from being burned, so restrained the forces which usually operated that they were not burned. That would be more nearly a type of the miracles of the Bible.

In one sense this latter would merely be a supernatural act like the previous one. But yet there is a peculiar personal quality about it which really makes it quite a different sort of thing, and warrants us in considering all such cases in a class by themselves. As far as the mere matter of power is concerned, both cases equally imply the power of the Creator,—of the one who at first established nature. And both alike are interruptions of the invariable working of that first established nature. But when we come to consider the reasonableness of such acts, they are entirely different. Their meaning would be different, and the purposes for which they could conceivably be performed would be quite different.

It is of this class of acts entirely that all the supernatural acts recorded in the Bible consist,—acts done personally for the sake of specific individuals. We may doubt whether there have ever been any of any other kind. But whether there have or not, this is the only kind that is recorded in this group that we are discussing, and so all our discussion of them may proceed on that basis. We need only consider them as personal, restricted acts of God, in distinction from His universal and continuous acts which constitute nature.

We might take for an instance the account of God carrying Elijah up by a chariot of fire to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). God constituted the law of gravita-

tion in the beginning by which everything tends to fall downward towards the earth. Here we see the body of Elijah going upward instead of downward, contrary to that law. But that is not what the real meaning and value of the incident is.

The real meaning is that God wished to personally perform an act of favour to the specific man Elijah, and did so irrespective of the fact that the process by which it was done held in abeyance or reversed the usual law of gravitation. It is the personal act of God to the specific individual which is the whole significance of the occurrence. The fact of its interfering or not interfering with a previous law of nature is entirely an incidental feature.

Or, again, suppose that God had at some time spoken with an audible voice that somehow could be heard by all intelligent beings, outlining some very important new ethical rules, in order to improve the moral character of the world. We certainly would call that a miracle,—a supernatural act in the usual definition of the term, and a very decided interposition into the course of nature. But it would not come within the class of occurrences that we have chosen to include in our definition, and of which we have said that all the supernatural in the Bible consists. We may express a decided doubt if there have ever been any supernatural acts of that character occurring anywhere, and if there have it certainly would be hard to reconcile them with the reasonable nature of all God's working.

But it is a fact of an entirely different nature if we suppose God has a special interest in a certain group of

individuals, and in order to make them feel His nearness and interest in them personally, He speaks with an audible voice to them alone, words which they hear and recognize as coming from Him (Ex. 20 : 1–19; Deut. 5 : 4, 22). The fact is then of an entirely different nature and value, even though, as before, these words spoken consist of important moral rules.

We are told that in our blood there are multitudes of little white cells that act almost like soldier guards, attacking and destroying harmful microbes and other injurious matter, and in this way they bring about recovery from disease. Because this apparatus has all been produced naturally in the course of evolution we may call it God's plan for curing disease by natural law. Suppose, however, it had never been so produced naturally, but God had some time suddenly introduced all this apparatus by some kind of a special interposition. Or suppose He should thus introduce some other universally operating apparatus to cure disease. We would properly call that a supernatural act in the common definition, and moreover it would be an act that it would be most difficult to reconcile with the character of a reasonable creator.

But it is an entirely different kind of a matter if we suppose a divine man finds a sick mother in the home of His friend Peter, and as a personal act of friendship expels the disease from her system because she is His friend and He sympathizes with her (Mark 1 : 30).

It is of this latter class of the supernatural that we will find all the supernatural events in the Bible to be composed, and it is this class to which we shall confine

our definition, and concerning which we shall make our inquiry and discussion.

We may define the supernatural we find in the Bible then as follows :—The supernatural of the Bible consists of acts of God which were done to single individuals or groups, which were restricted to them and to the specific occasion, and which were intended to impress them as personal acts of God definitely directed to them personally. This is in contrast with God's impersonal, continuous, universal activities, which we call Nature.

This definition will take in a few acts, like the plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, which were produced by purely natural means, and yet ought properly to be included in the same class with all the rest of the special or supernatural events. But on the other hand there is no supernatural event recorded in the Bible that would not be covered by that definition.

Perhaps it would have been better if we had found some other term to use as a designation for these incidents in the Bible which we are considering, and left the word "Supernatural" to its etymological meaning. But that word is now in universal use as the designation of these incidents, and no other good word seems to suggest itself for the purpose. Moreover we are disposed to assert on philosophical grounds, as we shall see later, that there are not, and cannot be, among God's activities in this world, any other supernatural acts aside from acts of this character, namely, personal acts, done with a personal motive to specific individuals or groups. That is the only kind of supernatural acts

it seems logical to suppose that God ever would do or has done.

Really then, in all these Bible incidents it is the restriction of the act of God to the specific individual that is the chief feature that we shall find significant, or need consider. The fact that the act itself is inside or outside of the usual workings of nature is a detail that is comparatively incidental and unessential as far as its value in the Bible motive is concerned. Aside from the fact that it is calculated to impress on our feelings that the act is really an intentional act of God we may comparatively disregard that feature of specialness or interruption of nature, provided only that we can find plausible justification for such acts occurring in a universe ruled by a perfect God.

III

THE POINT OF VIEW

THE point of view is very important. Any one who has tried to use a kodak has had this impressed upon him. The houses, trees and other objects in the picture may be practically the same, but by moving his camera to a new location to bring another part of the landscape into the foreground and make another center to his picture, the effect produced is entirely that of another scene.

It is very important that we decide what the central purpose of our religion shall be considered to be. Especially when we are considering whether the supernatural may properly have a place in our religion it is very necessary that we first accurately determine just what the fundamental essence and purpose of our religion is.

Up until a few generations ago there was no doubt in men's minds on that point. Religion was the means of Salvation. That was its central purpose. All men were doomed to eternal punishment on account of their sins, but by means of the offices of religion they could escape that punishment and have an eternal life of happiness in heaven. That was the purpose for which Christianity was established, and the great message which it brought to men. Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth expressly to die for us, that we might

be saved from death and have our sins forgiven. Of course there were many other things in the system,—privileges, duties, teaching and worship,—but the one central thing and the essential purpose was Salvation,—forgiveness of sins and the right to enter heaven.

Character and Service

Within the past few generations there has come to be a gradual change in the view-point. The old center has been shifted somewhat into the background, and a new center found about which popular theological thought is coming to arrange itself. The reality of blessedness and of punishments in the future life is still affirmed but it is made comparatively a secondary consideration. The real center which determines all the system is Character and Service. The object of religion is to build and purify character and to make men a more potent force in the uplifting of society.

In this new view the old elements are still retained. There is a future life of happiness or of misery before men according as they have or have not accepted Christ. Christ came to enable men to enter a future life of happiness in "His Father's House." But that happiness of the future life will be the result of character,—will consist of the purified and ennobled nature they have attained in this life by the help of Christ and His teaching and His Church. The real center of all the endeavour is made to be character, its great object the improvement and uplifting of both society and the individual. Knowledge of God, of course, has an important place in this scheme of religion, for His will is

to be the law of our lives, as His character is to be their standard.

In many respects this new view is felt to be a vast improvement over the old conception. It removes religion entirely from the charge of sordid selfishness. It removes all appearance of arbitrariness and cruelty from God's judgments and punishments. It makes the whole matter seem much more reasonable and practical in this practical, utilitarian age, and makes it all an appropriate and integral part of the evolution scheme.

Embarrassing Results Arise

But a new difficulty has arisen in an unexpected quarter. As the religious movement has come to seem more and more practical and reasonable it has some way come to seem less necessarily and distinctively divine. To continue the figure;—with the ethical motive brought so prominently into the foreground the supernatural has been crowded to the extreme background or blocked out of the picture entirely.

In the first place, as the aim and meaning of religion came to be conceived so reasonable and natural, the scientific mind began to feel that perhaps religion might not be an antagonistic thing apart, but might after all be found to be a scientific fact, that might be studied and demonstrated by the scientific method, natural results traced to natural causes.

It was found to have roots in Psychology, Ethics and Sociology, and to have developed in conformity with the evolution laws. So much was accounted for in that manner that it was assumed that in time it could

all be resolved into these purely natural elements, and there was no need for any divine factors or supernatural elements at all. In this way arose the comparative study of religions, with its natural corollary that Christianity, like all the other religions, was a natural product and composed of purely natural elements.

In the second place, and more important, it was felt that the presence of any supernatural element in religion was really a burden, as it was not only unnecessary and uncalled for, but would be a reflection on the competency of the evolution process.

This has been especially felt by those who hold the evolution process to be simply the method of God's working. Theistic evolution has so enormously raised and expanded our idea of God that they find it difficult to conceive of His doing certain classes of acts that were formerly considered to be quite appropriate, and among these they include all the supernatural in religion.

The marvellous intricacy and competence of the evolution process, interpreted as the work of God, has impressed us with God's infinite reasonableness and consistency, and made it impossible for us to believe His doing anything that would imply vacillation or incompetence. We cannot believe His doing anything so imperfectly that it would need to be later supplemented to enable it to achieve fully its purpose. Nor can we believe that after He had established one process or one set of agencies quite competent to produce a result He would afterwards contrive other agencies for the express purpose of producing that same result, or of

producing it faster or better than the first process was capable of doing.

We cannot conceive, for instance, of His instituting a created system so imperfect that it required repeated subsequent tinkering to make it attain the form that He desired. We cannot conceive that He made machinery of progress so wonderful and perfect that it produced a marvellous number and perfection of noble results in myriad fields, but in order to produce some certain few additional good results it required some wheels or appliances not originally provided for to be temporarily inserted.

This objection to the supernatural is not merely the hacknied charge that a miracle is a violation of natural law. It does not apply merely to the individual cases of specific miracles. It reaches to the whole fact of revelation itself, the whole idea of "Revealed Religion," of God having in any way contributed anything aside from what is furnished naturally by natural law, to the religious and moral uplift of men.

God originated in one compactly concatenated system a grand movement that has been able spontaneously, within its own characteristic working, to bring about myriad forms of progress and advancement in practically every direction. It has lifted and developed a primordial germ of a single cell, through all the stages up and up to the high level of man, and then endowed that man with marvellous mental power and moral and social impulses. But just one little stage from a lower to a higher ethical level in man could not be brought about spontaneously by forces within that system, and

so God had to specially and outside of the system prepare and supply an appliance adapted to effect that particular step of the progress,—by divine revelation and supernatural interpositions.

There are many natural causes that are operating to-day to improve men ethically and lead them to better moral conduct. These causes have produced many noble qualities and beneficent advances in countries where no teaching of our revealed religion has reached. But these already provided causes were not producing the desired results fast enough or thoroughly enough and God had to specially prepare and introduce other, not originally provided, appliances to produce the results more rapidly and more thoroughly. To say this would be to entirely belittle the ability of the Creator and of His first great act of creation.

Again, for the same reason we cannot conceive that God would give a special divine revelation of knowledge merely because men needed that knowledge faster than they were getting it, or needed higher teaching than they were attaining to unaided. God has in His first great creation system made so much knowledge and such high grades of knowledge spontaneously available to man, that it is inconceivable that He could not and would not, if He had so desired, have made all necessary or profitable knowledge sufficiently available without the necessity for any after additions.

We cannot believe it possible, therefore, that God should find it necessary to make any sort of special, occasional interposition or revelation merely to supply some help, teaching or moral uplift that became desir-

able but which men could not otherwise have attained. If then in the Bible we find accounts of supernatural facts occurring *for that purpose*, or if we are told that the Bible is itself a supernatural revelation given *for that purpose*, we find it at least a great strain on our credulity to try to believe those facts or to accept the Book on that basis, and our esteem for the Bible is thereby seriously weakened.

Eliminating the Supernatural

And so the task has been resolutely undertaken of eliminating the supernatural from the Bible. It was not undertaken in a spirit of hostility to either Christianity or the Bible, but rather the reverse. It was honestly felt that the supernatural elements were an incumbrance, that they were a hindrance to the acceptance of Christianity by the modern mind, that the scientific mind felt compelled to reject any system which had in it so much of that which it considered illogical and unbelievable, and so, in spite of its manifest superiority and power in so many other respects, it was rejecting the Christian religion on that account.

It was felt that if this objectionable feature could only be eliminated, Christianity, with its enormous power for good, would be more widely accepted by the modern mind. If some theory of interpretation could be devised for the Bible, to set aside all the supernatural and miraculous features while retaining the ethical teaching and inspiring power, the usefulness of that great historic classic might be greatly prolonged.

Naturally the elimination of the supernatural must

involve a rejection of the Divinity of Christ. This position has been consistently accepted by many. With many others the heart if not the mind insisted that the divinity of the Christ was too precious and too fundamental to be given up without destroying the whole system. And so they have made a brave attempt to retain that divinity as a fact while rejecting all the appropriate product of it both in the acts of Christ and in the propagation of His religion.

But by the great body of Christians this attempt has been felt to have been unsuccessful. The divine eliminated from the character of Christ or from His work and actions, would so mutilate the record as to make it meaningless. Moreover the person and the religion of Jesus have had too great influence in the world to be accounted for by any naturalistic hypothesis thus far devised. The New Testament, with all its supernatural features, is too well authenticated by abundant historical evidence to be successfully set aside or reconstructed. The attitude of a large part, if not the majority, of even critical thought at present is that the New Testament, with all its difficulties and contradiction of modern scientific tenets must still be accepted as a fairly accurate witness, and things did take place, for the most part, substantially as it records them.

But with the Old Testament it is different. The things it recounts lie largely outside the field of accurate historical examination. Its religion and teaching also are conceived to be superseded by the higher teaching and religion of the New Testament (in spite of Jesus' emphatic statement to the contrary),

(Matt. 5: 18). Here, thus, there seemed to be no obstacle to yielding a full consent to the scientific demands. Perhaps not consciously but none the less really a large section of recent, popular religious thought has settled down to the compromise of giving up the Old Testament entirely as a book of religious authority, and being content with a more or less fully accredited New Testament. And even in that New Testament, the supernatural features which were once esteemed the things of chief importance are now felt to be almost entirely without value if not indeed a positive burden.

Such then is the situation to-day, and the cause that has brought it about. Such is the question we are now confronting. Are we willing to contentedly acquiesce in this state as final, or do we still retain the hope that it may be only a temporary wave, and the old faith may again be found possible? May we still hope that something will yet be found that will justify the supernatural, and the Bible be again restored to its old place, our New Testament and divine Christ be again fearlessly believed without any apologies to scientific thought, and our Old Testament too be found a rich treasure of divine inspiration and life,—the whole Book alike be considered worthy the old title of "A Revelation" and "The Word of God"?

Legitimate Results of the Different View-Points

This process has all been perfectly logical and the respective conclusions quite legitimate. Both the old

view and the new were quite consistent and reasonable from their respective view-points. God is reasonable and consistent, and will never start a new process to accomplish something that He has already established another process to effect. Still, of course, if He has two distinct enterprises with different purposes He may be expected to freely employ in the second enterprise other agencies than those employed in the first, and so we might freely have these events which we call supernatural.

The old view considered that God did have such a second and entirely distinct enterprise, which had no connection with what we call Nature. It considered that what we call Religion or "Grace" was a matter that lay entirely outside the domain of nature. Nature has to do with this world. Religion has to do or is related entirely with heaven, where the conditions and laws of this world do not apply.

Religion was considered as an enterprise wherein God from without undertook to deliver man out of a situation of ruin into which he had gotten himself in this world, and to prepare him for entering a new life in an entirely new world separate and distinct from this. Of course from that view-point there would not be any impropriety in God doing whatever He pleased to accomplish that end, and it could be no reflection on the adequacy of the work which He had done in nature since that was a distinct enterprise entirely.

From that point of view any amount of miracles and special interpositions would be perfectly reasonable. Indeed we would surely expect that there would be

some activities in that enterprise that would be different from those that obtain in ordinary nature. So the old belief in the supernatural was entirely consistent from its view-point.

But from the modern view-point religion is not thus something entirely outside of the domain of nature. It has come to seem unreasonable to modern thought that God should have two such enterprises entirely separate and distinct, both concerned with men. Moreover it makes religion itself seem to be only a kind of "Repair Shop," a confession of failure in the first enterprise that had to be remedied by bringing in an entirely new and separate one. It has come to seem imperative that we should make religion an integral part and culmination of the one great enterprise that has been in progress all through the ages, and which we call Nature.

And so the new point of view conceives, as we have seen, the main purpose of religion to be character. There is individual character which consists of righteousness and goodness in the individual, and collective character which results from the work of religious men righting the wrongs and uplifting the condition of society. All this attempted under the help and direction of God is what constitutes that noble thing which we call religion.

This certainly is an integral part of the evolution system. While it implies incompleteness in the present state of affairs, and that "Perishing of the Unfit" which characterizes all the evolution program, yet it does not make any implication of fail-

ure or of new interpositions to remedy an unsuccessful work.

Religion is thus in the fullest degree a part of the evolution process, for it is but carrying on to completion that which it is the work of the whole process to effect. That whole process is a process of elevating and producing things of higher and higher moral worth. This is but the highest and noblest part of that one great enterprise of character building.

Here is a long process by which God is developing that noble thing—Christian Character. The natural agencies which He made provision for in the one great original act of creation were sufficient to almost accomplish the result. They were able to take the Amœba of one cell and elevate it on up and up to the level of man, and still on up to the moral level of a Socrates or a Confucius, but to go one step farther and elevate that Socrates or Confucius up to the moral level of the average Christian man was beyond the power of those provided agencies and necessitated this supplemental and supernatural divine activity.

Suppose a man was clever enough to contrive a machine to manufacture screws. The machine would draw out the steel wire, cut it to the proper length, taper one end to a point, cut the thread, roughly form up the head and cut a slit in it, but at that stage it could do no more, and he would have to take the screw out of the machine and smooth and polish up the head by hand. We would say that an inventor who could go so far could probably go just a little farther, and perfect his machine so it would finish the whole proc-

ess. Certainly we would say that his invention, wonderful as it was, still was short of perfection if it could not supply that last little detail also.

Just that is what we are asked to believe concerning God's work, if the essential object of religion is to improve character, and if it required this expenditure of special divine activity and special divine teaching in order to produce this final detail of Christian character. We cannot wonder at thoughtful men wishing that the supernatural could be entirely eliminated from our Bible and from our Christian system.

Is This the True Meaning of Religion?

But what if that is not after all the true meaning and purpose of religion? There is a story that a certain Chinese statesman was once watching some college youths playing a game of lawn tennis. As he watched them running and straining to knock the little ball backward and forward over the net he remarked to his companion:

"It is strange, when the Americans are so clever at invention, that they have not been able to devise a machine to perform that operation for them."

Well, though it would have required a rather large and intricate machine, yet if the only purpose of it all was to secure that a certain rubber sphere should be propelled a certain number of times over a net, very probably American invention would not have found it an impossible feat to construct a machine that would perform that operation. And if the forming of high and pure character was the only purpose, or the con-

trolling purpose God had in mind in religion, doubtless He would have been quite able to have arranged for the machinery of the evolution process to produce that work adequately, without the supplement of these supernatural accessories.

It is doubtless rather venturesome to dare to suggest that character and service are not the chief objects of religion and the highest purpose in life. It is so recently that we have left the lower conception that religion is merely a means of escaping hell and attaining heaven, that the early exhilaration of the higher motive is still upon us. The conception of character building and social service as the supreme motive has thrilled and captivated us. It seems such a high, unselfish and worthy motive in every way. And certainly it is a noble conception. Even if some other object may prove itself to be the higher and ultimate object of religion, we may be sure it will not discredit the importance of character. Though something else may be brought to occupy the foreground of the picture we may be sure that character and service will still be in the view and in a very prominent position.

But we must venture to claim that the development of character is not the chief and ultimate object of our Christian religion. *Our Christian religion is irrevocably committed to the supernatural*, and a supernatural propaganda, as we have seen, could not take that for its fundamental purpose without discrediting the competence of God's work in creation.

Moreover the Bible itself does not represent that to be the essence of religion. True, the word Religion

has various meanings and is sometimes used in that sense, or the name religion is given to that one of its products (cf. James 1:27). For it is true that our Christian religion has more influence to produce noble character and philanthropic service than any other known agency, and it was intended that it should do so. It is perfectly right that we should use it as an effective instrument to gain a higher manhood and make the world better. But that does not prove that that is its central and ultimate purpose. Every effect of an act is not necessarily to be counted as the formal purpose for which it was performed.

What then is the fundamental meaning of our Christian religion? What purpose is there that we may set down as its real, formal object, a purpose which is of such a nature as to justify supernatural events taking place in order to secure its accomplishment?

Jesus Himself has given us a definition. It was just before the end, at the Last Supper. He had been having that farewell talk with His disciples, and turns for a few moments of communion with the Father who had sent Him. In the opening words of that prayer (John 17:1–3) He states that His great purpose in coming into the world was to give Eternal Life to men. And then He defines what that Eternal Life is: "This is Eternal Life, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."

The great mission which Jesus Christ came into the world to accomplish was to enable men to know God. That to Him was the supreme thing, that the essence

of religion. To know a person is to be on terms of acquaintance with him. It means social intimacy, friendship and personal fellowship. Must we not then put that down as the meaning and ultimate purpose of religion, namely, to come into a condition of fellowship with God?

Fellowship With God

We will venture to define, then, that the supreme purpose and fundamental meaning of our religion is this which Jesus made possible by His coming, namely, fellowship with God. It is not merely a cold, impersonal scheme for developing character,—a sort of final finishing and polishing department in the great evolution factory. Much less is it merely a device to escape hell and get into heaven,—a sort of great Rescue Home or Repair Shop. There may be need enough for all these in this complex, battle-scarred old world of ours. But any object of sufficient moment to warrant the incarnation of the Supreme Being Himself and His visible residence for a while among created men, must certainly be something on a higher level than any of these.

Religion is fellowship with God. This is a definition that puts it in the very highest category possible. It makes it a thing quite worthy of having the greatest acts done on its account. The reason, perhaps, why it does not usually impress us more is because it has become so familiar. Our very idea of God has come to be built around it. God's efforts in that direction have succeeded so well that we in modern times have thor-

oughly gained this feeling of His approachableness. We have become impressed with His humanness,—as indeed He intended we should be,—but at the expense of His Infinite Majesty.

But if we will just try to think what is implied in the thought of friendship, intercourse and association with such a being as we have now come to know the Creator God is, what vistas of future promise it opens up as well as what ennobling and purifying of present life it entails, we will realize that it is truly the highest definition we could give, that it presents a motive well worthy of all that religion has claimed to do and be in the world, and as we shall see later, a motive for which it would be plausible to expect God to do some things that He had not done in carrying out the processes of ordinary nature.

We need hardly add that accepting this view means no possible slacking of zeal for Social Service, but on the contrary must result in the greatest help and stimulus for such service; as we shall more fully see later.

Historical Meaning of the Term

That this is really the true conception of religion will be readily apparent. Some form of worship or relation to some kind of gods has always been the kind of cult to which the name Religion has normally been applied. It is only in very recent years, and under the pressure of materialistic or naturalistic theories that the attempt has been made to give anything else except relations with God or the gods the name of religion.

When we consider the subject of religion as a world

phenomenon and as one of the elements of the world's life, some form of worship or some attitude towards some kind of gods or superior beings is always considered the essential feature. That has practically been the accepted definition of religion. If it could be shown that any given tribe made no attempt towards any worship or service of any kind towards any superior spirits or beings it would be thereby counted that they had no religion.

Ethics and religion are two distinct movements, and have had entirely distinct and separate genesis. The beginning of ethical discipline must have very far antedated the rise of religion, for we see the rudiments of it already in some of the higher animals. Religion is not an outgrowth or product of this ethical discipline. It is something separate entirely, and with a different origin. And it is not till we reach a comparatively late and high form of religion that any considerable amalgamation of ethics and religion is attempted and the authority of the gods put forth as the sanction for moral conduct.

Historically considered, then, and as a phenomenon of world life, what has been called religion has always been some sort of attitude towards gods or supernatural beings. It is the relation with divine or supernatural beings that constitutes it religion.

The Meaning of the Bible Religion

If this is the meaning of the term when applied to the ethnic religions, much more is it so when applied to Christianity and the Bible religion. Though ethics is

made more prominent there, and the ethical standards put much higher than in any of the ethnic religions, yet the relation with God is also made very much more intimate and absolute. It is put, also, upon a very much more sympathetic and familiar footing. To those complying with the conditions that relation is always made one of favour and protection, of confiding and real intimate fellowship. So intimate and sympathetic is it that the relation of children to a father is the term by which it is typically expressed.

Certainly since the coming of Christ the fundamental essence of the Christian religion has been communion and fellowship with God. That is the religion of the New Testament and the religion which Christ both taught and practiced. And as we shall see later, it is equally so of the Old Testament as well.

The evidence that this is so lies not so much in specific proof texts, though there are plenty of them (John 6 : 29 ; 15 : 15 ; 1 Cor. 1 : 9 ; 1 John 1 : 3, etc., etc.), as in the whole tenor of the teaching and the very nature of the system itself.

From first to last it is a personal relation to God that is urged and invited. Salvation is represented as reconciliation to God, bringing the prodigal back again to his father's house. The Christian life is always represented as serving God, walking with God, enjoying the favour and presence of God. Even sin is often rated not from its ethical badness nor its desert of punishment but from the fact that it separates us from God. Man's better character and conduct are represented as the result of a close relation with God rather than the

relation with God a result of the better conduct and character.

The purpose of the Bible is not theoretical but practical, and as the consequences of that new relation are so enormous to us, delivering us from eternal ruin and bringing to us an eternity of happiness, it is not strange that the consideration of those results bulks large in the teaching. It is not strange that Paul, writing to the Romans, a people where the authority of law was so prominently in the foreground, should make much of the point of "Justification by Faith." And yet, writing to other communities of a more contemplative turn he merely goes a little farther and shows that even this justification is for the purpose of bringing us back to God that in the ages to come He might lavish upon us the wealth of His loving fellowship (Eph. 2:7). Even to the Romans the justification is not an end but a means to a closer relation with God (Rom. 5:1).

The one thing which the New Testament always lays stress upon as the condition of salvation and basis of religious life is Faith, and this faith is practically almost another name for fellowship. It is true that this faith was once supposed to be merely the belief of various doctrines, and it seems to be so defined in some of the ancient creeds. But we now recognize that the "Faith" intended is something far more than that. It is not mere intellectual belief but a personal connection between the soul and God. It is a matter of trust and felt personal relation with a sympathetic God. Such faith is really one element of fellowship and certainly

implies the existence of this which we have called "Fellowship with God." It is the attitude of the soul that looks for and desires fellowship, and the attitude that makes fellowship possible.

The most conclusive consideration of all is Prayer. Prayer is an essential and fundamental feature in all religions everywhere, and certainly it has always been considered so in the Christian religion. The very essence of Christian prayer is communion and fellowship with God. We might almost say prayer is fellowship and that only, for really the things granted in answer to prayer are not the purpose for which prayer was instituted. The purpose for which prayer was designed by God was the fellowship of the prayer itself, and that is the main object. The things granted are merely a means to induce men to come and engage in the fellowship. Certainly prayer is fellowship, and prayer is the very essence of our religion.

Even heaven, the goal of religious hope, is presented to us as a matter of fellowship with God (John 14 : 3; Phil. 1 : 23, etc.). True, our materialistic imaginations have filled in the details with all kinds of materialistic and sensuous apparatus of pleasure, but the actual teaching of the Bible presents it chiefly as going to be with God in the glory of His presence,—as "Being at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5 : 8).

The whole practice of the Christian life, the condition of entrance to it and the heaven to which it looks forward all consist essentially of some phase of fellowship with God. If we wish to define the place of our religion among the facts and forces of the world we are

right in taking that as the term that really defines it. That is its value, and that is the place we must assign it in the great scheme of God's unfolding evolution. Christianity is "Fellowship with God."

It may be asked: What is new in that? Christians have always recognized that they have fellowship with God, and that it is a most blessed privilege. With many of the mystics it has bulked large, filling all the horizon of their deepest experiences. Even those who make most of social service and development of character do not necessarily lose sight of this other fact of fellowship with God, and may consider it a very important source of strength and comfort.

Precisely so. Our hearts have often judged more truly than our intellects. It is true we have always recognized that it is a factor, but we have not always put it in its proper place as the very center of the picture. It is not a question of the greatness of the benefit to us, nor a question of what we should spend most time and zeal upon, but a question of what is really the central and governing fact. The mountain may bulk larger in a picture than the deer in the foreground, nevertheless the picture is a picture of a deer and not a picture of the mountain, and is to be so judged.

Very possibly it is not the contemplation of this fellowship, but works of active social service and self-culture that ought to occupy the larger part of our time and interest. It is true that the deliverance from ruin and promise of eternal happiness do naturally make the stronger pull upon our feelings and will

furnish the stronger motive to induce men to enter the religious life. They will, and ought to be, for a long while yet, perhaps, the main staple of evangelistic preaching. And yet not these but fellowship with God is the central fact, the ultimate purpose and what we must define the real essence of religion to be.

Now if the essence of religion is fellowship with God we shall see as we proceed that not only would it not be a violation of nature and a burden to the cause of Christianity for such things as these supernatural incidents in the Bible to occur, but they are really normal and necessary. Indeed religion could not arise and exist without the occurrence or at least the belief of some such acts.

IV

SOCIAL SERVICE

IT will not be surprising if some are not disposed to greet very enthusiastically the demand that we must substitute "Fellowship with God" as the essential aim of religion in place of the cultivation of Character and Social Service. What! Are we to go back to the middle age conception! Are we to encourage people to live in cells and cloisters and spend their time in rapt meditation,—and leave the world to groan and rot!

Not at all. These great philanthropic and sociological enterprises are the glory of our awakened Christian life. They are themselves part of the fellowship (Matt. 25 : 40 ff.). They are preëminently the mission, as they should be the passion, of every Christian man. They may well be said to gauge the genuineness of any man's religion in these days.

But that does not mean that religion itself may not contain something else than these, noble as they are. Even admitting that they ought to be the supreme absorbing employment of every friend of God, that does not prove that the friendship itself, and the personal fellowship and communion, are not something to be considered and are not something higher and nobler even than this Service and this Character.

Social Service Our Chief Work but Fellowship a Higher Thing

Unquestionably these great civic, ethic and sociological movements mark the highest standard to which Christian living has yet attained. The more religious a man is to-day the more completely he will absorb his life and energies in forwarding these noble ends, and the more completely he ought to do so. But that does not prove that there may not be something else intrinsically higher than all these, and that higher something the thing to which we ought properly to give the name Religion.

If a man is a groceryman or in some other business he ought to give his most earnest thought and energy to that business. The one great purpose and effort of his life will be to sell as many groceries as possible and do a large and successful business. During the larger part of his waking hours his thoughts and efforts will be strenuously engaged in that one enterprise. But that does not say that he does not prize his home with its personal fellowship with wife and children, and that he may not consider that personal relationship and fellowship a thing far higher than his selling groceries.

The fellowship does not interfere with his selling groceries. It does not even compete with it. The more he loves his wife and children, and the more he prizes their fellowship, the more he will strive to make his business successful. That home fellowship is something different from and on a higher plane entirely than the selling groceries.

Just so, our fellowship with God is a something on a higher plane than even our caring for the sick and revising factory laws. It is not to be questioned which should be given more prominence or more time, any more than in the other case the man questions to which he shall give the more prominence or more time, selling groceries or loving his family. The two are not competitors in any sense. So these two also are not competitors whose relative importance is to be calculated and balanced. The love and fellowship with God is a something on a higher plane and in a separate category entirely.

Fellowship Stimulates Service, and Yet That is Not Its Main Purpose

We may say truly that the more a man loves and has fellowship with God the more earnestly he will devote his life to these noble practical aims, just as we have said that the more a man loves his wife and children the more he will feel impelled to try to be successful in business. No man can say that urging an increased spirit of fellowship and communion with God is likely to draw off interest from the sociological and ethical work. On the contrary, there is nothing that has so much influence in rousing and intensifying passion for that work as a real fellowship with God. If one is anxious to see this sociological work carried on vigorously there is nothing else that will so much forward it as to have men come into warm and constant personal fellowship with God.

And yet, on the other hand, we must repudiate

strongly the idea that this fellowship with God is primarily for the sake of the social service, that it is to be considered but a means to produce that service, that that is its main use and it is to be esteemed and encouraged primarily for that reason. He would not have a very high idea of life who would say that since the more a man loves his wife and children the more earnestly he will try to be successful in his grocery business, therefore family affection ought to be urged and encouraged for the sake of the grocery trade.

Social Service is Fellowship, and Yet Fellowship Transcends It

We have not, however, given an entirely fair illustration. For this service of morals and sociology is not an enterprise separate and apart. It is fellowship. It is really itself a high form of fellowship, for it is working side by side with God in the same work with Him. This social work is God's own great enterprise, and the very matter of working at it is engaging with Him in the same work in which He is engaged, and that is fellowship. This sociological work itself can really all be included under the one term as part of that great something which we call fellowship with God.

And still, though social service may be truly fellowship with God yet we must not forget that fellowship far transcends this service. The service is only one part or one feature of the fellowship.

A man comes home and helps his wife beat the carpets and clean the windows, and that very work is a form of fellowship with her. But home fellowship and

family life is something more than house-cleaning. It is a higher concept entirely, however necessary the house-cleaning may be.

Moreover, houses were not made only for cleaning. Though some men may be inclined to think otherwise when the spring house-cleaning drags on day after day, yet it is normally to be expected that some time it will be finished, and only the daily dusting and tidying will be sufficient for the needs of comfortable living.

So this moral renovating and cleaning of the house social and civic, though it does seem to be a long and tedious process, yet we cannot believe to be necessarily a permanent part of the world's program and always a major feature of the meaning of right life. As truly as that work is efficiently done it must more and more tend to become unnecessary. There ought to come a time when it will no longer be a main feature of human duty. The house will be cleaned.

That happy time may not be for a hundred years yet, or even for many hundred years. Yet even so, who can say that in the whole long range of coming human history our present age, when social service is the most pressing duty, may not be comparatively but like one short house-cleaning week. In the Bible teaching there are passages that are usually interpreted to indicate that there is such a prospect in the future, extending out to a far horizon, during which the world is to be a scene of happy "Millennial" purity. Will there be nothing to constitute religion then because there is no more house-cleaning to be done?

Fellowship Demands Service, But it is Service for Fellowship's Sake

Now, in this house-cleaning age, we must recognize that house-cleaning is the one supremely important thing to be done. Let us not slacken our efforts or interest in any respect, but rather increase them. Nor must it be any disparagement of this civic and sociological work to say that there is another category on a distinctly higher plane, and the real essence of religion is this fellowship with God. To exalt that fellowship is no incentive or excuse to neglect the social service, but quite the reverse. For under present circumstances fellowship with God can only be counted to subsist where there is an interest in that sociological work, for there is where God and His interest are at present. A man can hardly claim to be on terms of very devoted love and fellowship with his wife if he sits idly by reading poetry while his wife has her sleeves rolled up and is scrubbing, lifting and cleaning. Now is a time when our fellowship with God must show itself chiefly in our passion for this work in which He is interested and engaged.

But even so, we must not lose sight of the feature of fellowship in that social service. That is the point that we are insisting on here. For it is the reality of this feature of fellowship which is the justification of all this which is called the Supernatural in religion.

There is an important difference between mere house-cleaning as a fact in itself and house-cleaning considered as a feature of family life and fellowship,—be-

tween merely cleaning a house as a fact and fellowship expressing itself through necessary house-cleaning. In the one case all that is necessary is physical strength and some training. In the other case there has been involved at some time a wedding, before that a courtship, a meeting and a long acquaintance. All of these have been necessary antecedents of that family life and affectionate fellowship of which this house-cleaning is one present necessary expression.

If we look upon family life as merely an expedient to insure having some one to help with the house-cleaning then all this matter of courtship and affection must seem superfluous and absurd,—just as miracles would be superfluous if ethics and social service were the sole aim of religion.

No supernatural elements, that is no special display by God of personal interest in us, would have been necessary if ethical considerations and sociological reforms were alone as independent facts, and were the highest possible discipline of the human life. All that would then have been necessary would have been education and motive,—training and wages. Both of these could be provided for in the ordinary operation of nature, without the personal meeting, courtship, wedding and affectionate intercourse of God's supernatural dispensations towards men. But these are absolutely necessary to effect that spirit of family affection and fellowship with God, which, though it is the main support of all the present sociological movement, yet far transcends it, and is a fact in itself, on an immensely higher plane.

Mistaken Conceptions of Fellowship

One reason why we have not given fellowship with God the chief place as the essential meaning of religion is because we have had a wrong and inadequate idea as to what kind of a thing fellowship with God ought to be.

We make the mistake of thinking that fellowship with God is an emotional something that has only to do with quiet hours of abstraction and meditation. This is a practical age. This is an age for doing things, not for cultivating our obscure feelings,—not for forcing a sentimental glow of emotions but for hard-headed planning, studying and working, to meet the strenuous conditions of life and fill creditably one's place in society, as well as to help other men and better the condition of the world.

But fellowship with God is not necessarily a matter of soft, sentimental feelings. Our fellowship with men is not necessarily of that nature. The fellowship of two sentimental schoolgirls may have considerable of the soft emotional about it. But our fellowship with people will be very much in accord with our characters and occupations. The fellowship of scholars will be on a scholarly plane. The fellowship of two great engineers or artists will be infused with their work and interests. Two business partners may have most intimate and constant fellowship consisting almost entirely of hard-headed business planning and working.

God is a being of boundless wisdom. Surely the scholar may have a fellowship with such a God fully appropriate and satisfying to his scholarly nature. God

made the world with all its mechanical and chemical subtleties, a most intricate and capable machine and a most perfect work of art, and He is constantly managing all its interests and operations with perfect competence. No engineer or artist, no business man or keen executive, need fear that in fellowship with God he is not meeting with one fully his equal *in his own specialty*, and one whom he can treat and associate with on that basis. He who spent fifteen long years with hammer and saw and plane in the Nazareth shop, working to buy bread for His mother and younger brothers, can be a congenial enough companion for any working man to-day.

Is it perhaps because of exaggerated prominence we have so long given to pardon of sins and the conditions of entering heaven that we have come to consider God a being chiefly interested in exercises of obscure, introspective emotion, when really He is the most out-of-doors, practical, businesslike being in the whole universe. To come into real, practical companionship with such a being must be a bracing inspiration to any man in any business. There may be a fit place for emotion, and there is an important use for "The Quiet Hour," but in ordinary practice the greater part of our fellowship with God is to be something erect, open-eyed, in the broad daylight of our busy working day life.

Shall we ask for a definition of this word Fellowship? Like a great many other things, perhaps, we know it in our own experience better than we can define it in terms. Of course Prayer is a part of it,—

but only a part. Not all of our human fellowship consists in talking with each other. True fellowship is something far deeper, of which talking is only an incident.

Among other things it will imply harmony and coöperation in various lines. There should be harmony of desire,—which in the case of such a friend as God must be the same as obedience. There will be harmony of ideals, which will affect the whole range of character and ethics. There will be unity of purpose, which again must bring in the whole field of social service,—especially since Christ Himself has said,—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ye have done it unto me."

In general, all that range of relations which in the Bible and Christian literature are indicated by the terms Faith, Trust, Worship, Service, Communion and the like are properly included under this term Fellowship. The one essential is that there be an appropriate, personal friendly relation with a personal God.

V

PLACE OF RELIGION IN EVOLUTION

WHAT is the place of religion in the evolution scheme, or in the course of nature? Under the old conception that religion was merely a means for getting into heaven, it had no place there. It was distinctly differentiated from things natural, and declared to have no connection with this world or natural law.

Under the more modern popular conception religion is brought entirely within the sphere of nature and made an integral part of evolution and natural law. But it is made so at the expense of all its distinctive individuality. It is not a separate and distinct thing at all but just a separate name given to old elements always familiar in nature. It is merely aspiration after improvement of character,—merely morality, sociology and altruistic emotion, tinged with more or less belief of the existence of God.

If our definition is correct, and its essence is fellowship with God, has religion then any place in the scheme of nature and evolution? If so, what is its place in the scheme?

We will find that it has a most natural and integral place in the scheme of nature and evolution, and that its standing is not that of a mere blend of old and familiar elements, but it is, as we instinctively feel it

ought to be, a new, a higher and a critical advance step in that great evolution progress. It is a step entirely different from anything achieved in the lower reaches of the evolution process, yet entirely consistent with that process. Indeed it is a step of such a nature that all the rest of the process may be conceived as preparatory to it, and looking forward to it as its goal or purpose.

God's Relation to This World

If religion is thus really a part of the evolution program what is its relation to the rest of evolved nature? To answer this question we must first define the connection of God with nature, since religion, as we assume, consists in a personal relation with God.

In nature and the evolution process the theistic evolutionist sees merely God's method of working. Whether we consider the energies and elements of nature to be independent entities, and that He created and controls them, or whether we consider them to be His immediate activity exerted at the time, is a question of no particular urgency. In either case equally it is all His work, instituted and established by Him. If it is all His work, then, as we shall see, with all its results, it is the expression of some *purpose* in His mind. That is the point we wish to emphasize. Each and every feature of nature is the result of some real purpose or desire in the mind of God.

The theistic evolutionist sees in God not merely some force or agency behind nature producing its laws, but a living, autonomous person. He conceives God to be a real, intelligent, personal being, and as such always

acting with purpose, that is to say, to satisfy some desire.

As a matter of fact we naturally conceive of Him in terms of man's own spirit or mind. He may be far more than that, and may have attributes and powers we cannot construct any conception of. But we have good reason to believe He has all the attributes and faculties that man's spirit or mind has. And so we form our conception of Him by imagining such a mind in infinite proportions.

To do this is not the belittling of God to man's form, which is popularly called Anthropomorphism. On the contrary it is forming the highest conception of God that it is possible for us to form. We have no higher materials out of which to construct a conception.

It is those who reject this conception who belittle God. To consider Him merely a great force or tendency is to make Him merely a species of physical energy, like heat or gravity, and measurable in horse-powers. To consider Him merely a great pervasion of life or mind stuff, without consciousness and without personality, is really to classify God as a great vegetable.

We are not to define Him by bounding Him with any of the limitations of our own minds, but if we would form our highest possible conception of God we must conceive that He is all that we are and that all our ordinary positive thought processes or powers have a place in His mind.

Now one of the most essential and fundamental features of man's mind is Purpose. Purpose or desire forms the source of all our acts. We have a desire,

and we do a certain thing to realize that desire and get pleasure or satisfaction. Such is the essence of all personal activity. If God is to be conceived in terms of the attributes of our own minds we must believe, as we have said above, that He also has that trait and that His acts are done to realize some satisfaction which He desires.

What Was God's Purpose?

If it be proper then for us to interpret all God's acts in terms of desire and purpose we may reasonably ask the question :—What satisfaction did God wish to obtain by any given act?

With us the satisfaction of any act may be physical, mental, social or purely ethical, but some desired satisfaction stands before every act as its purpose. The more mature, cultured and competent we are the more fully we will perceive and enjoy all the satisfactions that any act makes possible. If God is infinite and perfect we may assume that He perceives, enjoys and intended to enjoy all the satisfactions His works are capable of affording.

This great universe progress or evolution process, if it is God's work, must not be looked upon as merely an aimless splash of articulated logic spreading out in various directions. It is a volitional act done with a purpose. And we must assume that God does enjoy, and intended to enjoy, every item of satisfaction that it is capable of yielding Him.

If by this great process He has made radiant suns revolving in beautiful orbits, we may assume that He

enjoys fully all the satisfaction their beauty is capable of affording Him, and that He intended to enjoy it in making them. If He has made marvellous intricacies of chemical and physical interaction, forms of crystallization and beauties of colour, we may assume that He takes from them all the artistic satisfaction they are capable of affording, and that He intended to do so. If He made animals with their wonderful actions, and man's mind with its wonderful powers of logic, memory and imagination, we may assume that these too are things that He takes satisfaction in watching and contemplating.

Social Fellowship is the Highest Kind of Satisfaction

While we could find satisfaction in the enjoyment of any or all of such things, there is one source of satisfaction and enjoyment that is far higher and more satisfactory to us than any one of these. That is personal fellowship,—the social intercourse of soul with soul. That we consider the highest and most satisfactory form of enjoyment, and in a class by itself above all other kinds.

If there were the possibility then of God's taking that kind of satisfaction also from anything that He had made, must we not assume that He would certainly do so? When His created creatures had evolved up to the level of intellectual, moral, social man there was a creature which could afford to Him that species of satisfaction. There was a creature that could afford to Him precisely this which we consider the highest

form of satisfaction. So must we not assume that He would take the enjoyment of that fellowship, and that that was one of His intentions in the development of this creature, man? Or rather we may say:—When the Bible distinctly declares that God does desire and ask for that fellowship we must at least concede that it is not declaring something unscientific or illogical.

To say that there could be this interplay of social communion between man and God does not imply that man has become as great as God or in the same class with Him. It merely implies that God is as great as man and has every capacity and faculty that man has. With a being of a still higher order than man there might be between that being and God something as much higher than this fellowship as social fellowship is higher than chemical affinity. But this interplay of soul communion which can take place between you and another man can certainly take place between you and God, for God has every power and capacity that that other man has. And in as far as God's nature is to be conceived in terms of our nature we must assume that He would find satisfaction in that interplay of communion, would want it, and would plan to have it.

This fellowship with God which our Bible teaches is a perfectly natural extension then of the one great evolution progress. It is simply the highest yet evolved of many progressive advances. We may start with merely matter and energy existing. Then we have next physical motions and chemical affinity,—the action of energy upon matter. Then we have life,—the control of energy and matter by life and mind,

culminating in conscious volition and an autonomous person. As this person advances higher and higher he at length reaches a stage when there is possible this communion and companionship between him and God, so that begins.

It is no more supernatural or abnormal for it to begin than it was for chemical combination to begin as soon as advancing conditions arrived at the stage where it was possible, or for life to begin its career of control and conscious achievement as soon as the conditions had developed for that.

It is all very natural, indeed necessary, when we come to take this ultimate and adequate view of the evolution process,—when we come to view as the basal fact not the material and energies and the changes they are made to go through, but God planning all those changes and effectively bringing them about. Viewed that way evolution has intelligible meaning. That is the only view of evolution that philosophy and theology should take or can be satisfied with. Nor has science any particular reason to combat that view.

Clear-Cut Concept of God

It may seem at first, perhaps, to some that this is merely a speculative discursion,—interesting but of no conclusive value. But it is more than that. It is rather an attempt to force a clear-cut form to our conception of God,—the common conception that "God is a Spirit," and to follow that conception out to its legitimate results. It is not scientific to form hazy, indistinct, indefinite conceptions. If there are just three

kinds of things that we know anything about,—matter, energy and mind,—we do know something very definite about each of them, as to what they can do, and we must treat them accordingly.

If we conceive a thing to be matter we must think of it as having the attributes that matter has; if as energy we must think of it in terms of the attributes and laws that energy has. Equally if we conceive it to be mind we must think of it in terms of the characteristic attributes and propensities that mind is known to have.

We are merely insisting that God, "A Spirit," must be conceived as having the characteristic attributes and propensities that we see in the other spirits that we know, that is to say that like all other minds He does things to secure satisfactions that He desires. Also that like all other minds that we know, one of the things that would appeal to Him as a satisfaction to be desired would be fellowship and personal intercourse with other minds.

We perhaps should note the fact that the pleasure we find in fellowship comes from giving favours and happiness to a loved one quite as much or more than from receiving favours. The higher and purer the nature of the man the more the pleasure of giving comes to exceed the pleasure of receiving. We might conceive, therefore, that with the infinitely high and perfect nature of God it would be the pleasure of giving favours only that He would desire. When we speak hereafter of God deriving pleasure from our fellowship we ought perhaps to consider that this giving of favours is what affords Him pleasure in the fellowship.

Still that is real fellowship and all we may say applies to that as much as to any other kind of fellowship, if that is the thing that God desires. All our obedience, service and communion may be desired by God only for the benefit and happiness they bring to us.

Grant then that the evolution process is the product of mind acting with a purpose, and it is perfectly legitimate and logical to conclude, from the analogy of our own minds, that one of the purposes or desires the Supreme Mind *might have had in view* was the satisfaction of fellowship and personal communion with these evolved minds as soon as they had evolved high enough to make it possible.

We say "might have had," for notice that all we are trying to show in this place is merely that the fellowship with God, which our Bible teaches, is in the line of the evolution process,—that it belongs in the same enterprise as all the rest of nature. We are not claiming by the above argument to positively prove that this fellowship is a fact and that God desires it, though really the argument does have great force as pointing that way. We have that belief already from other sources. We are taking for granted that God does desire this fellowship,—that there is sufficient ground in the Bible and in other religious teaching for believing that God's desire for this fellowship and His granting it to men is a fact. We are merely insisting here that this accepted fact of fellowship between men and God is not something entirely apart from nature and outside of the evolution process. It is strictly part and parcel of the one great scheme of na-

ture. It is distinctly connected with and implied in the great evolution movement,—if indeed it may not be considered the one great goal and culmination of the whole process of biological evolution.

It is thus then that we would find our answer to the question, "What is the relation of religion to nature and the evolution process?" It is an integral part and culmination of it all. For religion is fellowship with God, and this fellowship with God is quite of a piece with God's purpose in all the rest of evolving nature.

Purpose of the Whole Evolution Process

Really the theistic scientist should be a much more enthusiastic admirer of evolution than the materialist or agnostic, because it means so much more to him and is so much more complete and reasonable. The materialist or agnostic merely sees a long chain of articulated changes following each other and growing out of cause and effect. He follows back along the route of this progress, and presently he comes to a great chasm that he cannot bridge. For the introduction of life is a fact for which he has thus far been unable to find any adequate cause.

But picking up the trail again beyond that break, he finds the same receding line of physical interactions and chemical combinations. He follows still back. He knows that this progress could not have been going on forever. It must have started some time but he is utterly unable to find any cause that could have started it, or any reason why it should not have started un-

thinkable millions of ages earlier if it was capable of starting at all.

Beyond a certain point in the past, then, there is to him an utterly incomprehensible blank. Looking forward also he is able to see nothing but the gradual running down of the forces and processes now in progress, and beyond that an equally void and incomprehensible blank.

To the materialist evolution is merely a magnificent fragment. It is like a vast bridge, resting on nothing at either end, and even broken in two in the middle.

But to the theistic evolutionist all is clear and logical, and as natural as for a man to move his hand or limb. It is all simply an act of God done by Him to achieve some object which He wished to achieve. God stands in eternity, like all mind or spirit not necessitated to fixed times but freely at His own will and time originating acts and carrying them on. This great universe process, so long and vast to us, is but one of His leisurely acts. He began it when He chose to do so, and is consistently and competently carrying it on.

Not only does every phase of the act and its product yield presumably some satisfaction to Him, but we may plausibly suppose that, like our acts, it has some central, determining purpose which is the primary object it is to achieve in its totality.

If this be so it would not be impossible to suppose that this main purpose of it all or at least of that part of it which we call Biological Evolution was precisely this which we have been considering, this desire on God's part to have this pleasure of fellowship,—to pro-

duce a race of beings capable of affording Him this opportunity which He desired of bestowing fellowship.

We must not suppose, of course, that this means anything like a companionship of equality between God and men. It does not mean that like companionship between equals this would fill all God's mind and be a major factor in His life. We may suppose that it would be no more to God comparatively than to a man would be the companionship of a pet bird or kitten, or something a million times smaller still. Yet it would be true, genuine fellowship. God did want it. And all this evolution process was His act bringing it about. And all this evolution process, by the way, though so long to us, is an act that would bulk no larger, comparatively, in His infinite life than would to a man the act of plucking a violet to smell its fragrance.

The Evolution Process Foreshadows Fellowship by Men With God

When we turn to the converse side we find practically the same lesson taught by the evolution process.

Progress has branched out in many directions, and various different species might perhaps be considered the most advanced in each of several lines. We might, perhaps, consider the tiger, the elephant, the eagle, the ant, etc., as each marking the highest attainment of evolution in their particular directions. And yet in considering the ultimate trend or meaning of the evolution system we do not consider any one of them of any significance, but only the one line which has led

up to our human species, and man himself at the head of it.

In man himself we no longer consider the development of the physical body as the significant, governing fact, but wholly the development in the sphere of mind and spiritual functions.

There have been several great items of development in this sphere. At some point in the past the advancing species first developed the power of abstract thought, of logical reasoning, of articulate speech, of moral consciousness. All these were advance steps, taken when the time was ripe for them. And they added very much to the worth and rank of the developing creature.

Of course the evolution advance is going on now just as much as ever. There are new forward steps yet to be taken by this developing species. This advance may possibly be in a number of different lines, but there is one line most plausible and probable and which seems to be the most promising of them all. That is the line of social progress.

Man has made great advance and development on the side of his social nature. Social fellowship is perhaps the most important of all the factors that make up life. It is noble and ennobling in proportion with the greatness and nobility of the persons with whom we have the social fellowship. If then we should come to be able to have this same social fellowship with God Himself it would manifestly mean the greatest benefit and ennobling that we can conceive of, coming to us.

As we look back over the course of evolution we see evolving nature apparently able some way to attain every phase of advance that has presented itself as valuable. In every case, in some way the facilities have at the right time been provided for making the particular advance that would be profitable. Analogy would therefore lead us to expect that this advance step will also be made, and that the facilities will all be afforded for man to make it. It certainly would be a most fitting and most splendid next step of evolution progress, and we may believe that it is very probable that it will actually be made.

The facilities that would make this fellowship possible would be for God to bestow manifest acts of fellowship on His part, and to plainly invite it from us. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to expect that such acts of fellowship would be granted by Him to us. And that is just what He is represented as doing in all the supernatural in the Bible. That is exactly what all the supernatural is.

We have seen, then, that an advance into a state of fellowship with God seems a plausible next step in the evolution of man. And we have also seen that considerations of God's purpose in the whole creation process would lead us to expect that He would want that fellowship and would therefore bestow fellowship upon us.

From both sides, thus, it is seen to appear probable that the next step in the evolution process at this point will be an advance into a state of social fellowship between God and men. And this is precisely what we have defined religion in its essence to be.

Religion, therefore, defined as personal fellowship between men and God, is not only something consistent with and part of the evolution system. It is a supreme and culminating part of that system, to which all the lower parts of the system look forward as their purpose or goal. And all the supernatural in the Bible, since it is but the concrete acts of that fellowship on God's side, is really a perfectly logical and integral part of the one great evolution movement.

VI

VALUE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

WHAT, then, is the meaning, the value and the use of the supernatural in the Bible? It is not enough merely to prove that it is not unreasonable, not a blemish and a burden. It must have some positive use. And since it is such a large factor and prominent feature of the Book it must have some very important and fundamental value. What is that value? The answer has been already quite evidently outlined.

It is too common with us to think of all God's actions towards men as intended solely to advance right living and make the world better. We thus conceive that the supernatural should be primarily a contribution towards that object, that the prophecy and revelation were intended to teach men right conduct and the supernatural acts to reward or punish them for their good or bad lives. Or on broader lines we conceive of God dealing with nations to restrain their evil tendencies, and to specially preserve and prosper one nation that was better than the rest and train and make it fit to be a model and inspiration to the rest of the world.

Really God does do all those things, but He does not do them by supernatural acts. He does them all by natural law. He was wise and competent enough to be able in His first great creative system to foresee and

provide entirely sufficient agencies for all that. He never has to do any supplementary work now for that purpose. As we have already seen, any supplementary acts now primarily for such a purpose would be a reflection on the sufficiency of His great creative act,—which was explicitly declared to be "All very Good" (Gen. 1. 31).

Secondary Uses

A very common interpretation is that the supernatural acts, or many of them, were done for the purpose of accrediting divine teachers and teaching. God was giving revelation of rules for right living and worship, and in order that men might be assured that these rules and commandments were really from God He accompanied them with various supernatural signs as proof that they were really from Him. Various important religious doctrines were revealed, and in order that men should be convinced that they were from God and to be believed, God accompanied their revelation with some special divine mark or supernatural sign.

It cannot be denied that that value does inhere in some of these acts. Such acts as are recorded to have been done by Christ and by the apostles and prophets are certainly adequate proof that the power of God was working through and with them, and they do increase our feeling that what they said and did had the indorsement of God. Jesus Himself appeals to His supernatural works as evidence of His person and authority (John 10:38), though there is conclusive proof that that was not the motive that prompted them (cf. Mark 8:12).

Since we can find, as we see elsewhere, an entirely sufficient motive for all these supernatural facts aside from their evidential or disciplinary value, and a motive that brings them entirely within the program of nature and the evolution scheme, we may freely admit that as secondary results or by-products they not only give important teaching and accredit divine agents, but were definitely intended by God to do so. Saying that is saying no more than when we say :—"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork." Both the act of making the heavens revolve and the act of performing these special personal deeds are equally and alike proofs of the presence of God and contributions to our knowledge of Him. But that is not the principal purpose that produced the acts in either case.

These acts have on appropriate grounds an acknowledged and integral place in the one great universe scheme, and their specialness is fully justified, so there is no more incongruity in their contributing to common evolutional enterprises, like the teaching and welfare of men, than there would be in electricity or chemical affinity so contributing. And yet it is impossible for us to accept that as the principal purpose that produced them.

It is quite proper, in colloquial use, to say that these supernatural facts do contribute and were intended to contribute to the teaching and welfare of men, and to accredit men with special divine authority. Indeed in our ordinary devotional thought and evangelical preaching that, perhaps, is the purpose we ought

chiefly and ordinarily to attribute to them. Just as it would be silly pedantry in our colloquial talk to refuse to speak of the sun rising and setting.

But it is different when we come to make an exact philosophical definition. Then we must recognize that it would be illogical to conceive of God doing any special or supernatural act primarily and specifically for the purpose of giving teaching that could not have been gotten otherwise, or of accrediting some person to give such teaching.

Primary Motive of the Supernatural

When we come to make a philosophical definition, and seek the one fundamental purpose for which all these supernatural acts were done, we will find that they were all done *as acts of fellowship* by God to men, and *done just for fellowship's sake.* That is their primary purpose, that is their meaning, and that is what we must consider the one fundamental value of all of them.

When we realize that this is their meaning and their purpose, all the philosophical objections to them disappear entirely. They cease to be exceptional, abnormal events and interpositions that have to be justified and accounted for, and take their place as a natural and appropriate,—indeed necessary,—part of the one great universe enterprise of God.

For we have already seen that the whole of Biological Evolution seems to look forward as its culmination to God enjoying fellowship with man when he was developed. That seems to be the most natural and

plausible step to expect, and indeed seems to have been the purpose that underlay the whole enterprise from the beginning. And these supernatural acts are merely the concrete exercise of that fellowship. They are really the only way in which it could be effectively bestowed.

All the supernatural acts are personal acts of fellowship done by God to men just because He wanted to engage in that fellowship. The fellowship of the acts themselves was the one great purpose and primary cause, and such a fellowship was a purpose that practically lay infolded in all the course of evolution that went before it and led up to it. This fellowship was as distinctly contemplated in the one great original constitution of things as any other part of the evolution program,—just as much as revolving of suns or chemical affinity or human reason. The intention of this fellowship in the mind of God was a distinct part, and possibly one of the major parts of the impulse that brought about the whole universe process.

Fellowship Must Consist of Just Such Acts

It is obvious that fellowship could only be had by means of some such acts as these supernatural events recorded in the Bible. It must consist essentially of just what these acts are. Fellowship must consist of *personal acts of God done to specific individuals*, and that is an accurate and complete description of just what all these supernatural acts consist of (cf. pp. 33, 34, etc.).

Here then we have the entire answer to the question:

—What is the purpose, meaning and use of these supernatural acts? They are all acts of fellowship. That is the one main purpose that philosophy must recognize, even though there may be other secondary results and by-products from them which seem to us more evident and important because they give such exceedingly great personal benefits to us.

That God could accord fellowship to men only by doing acts like these supernatural acts of the Bible will be readily apparent. What is fellowship? What is it as it exists between man and man in human relations? We will doubtless agree that it must be something immediate, something directed to definite individuals and something personal.

There is no fellowship in the fact that you live under the rule of the king of England or the emperor of Germany and get the protection and benefits that come from their rule. There is no fellowship in the fact that you contribute a sum of money to a famine relief fund for a general distribution of food. There is no fellowship in the fact that you get great benefit from the machines invented by Singer or Bell.

But it is fellowship when the king or emperor stops in a hospital to speak a word to a single wounded soldier, though the benefit received be not nearly so great as in the other case. It is fellowship if you take the money or the food and go personally and give it definitely to one or more sufferers. It is fellowship if the inventor takes you personally through his factory and explains all its workings, or even if he merely meets you on the street and asks the way to the post-office.

There is no fellowship in the fact that you receive from God the sunlight and the air, that He makes the crops grow that feed you and spreads out all nature to give you instruction, comfort and joy. "In Him we live and move and have our being," but there is no fellowship in that.

But it was fellowship if He specially at one single time provided the meal for the support of the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17 : 16), or preserved the lives of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3 : 19–25). It was fellowship if He stood and talked with Abraham of the eruption that was going to destroy the cities of the plain (Gen. 18 : 16–33). It was fellowship if He ever did any favour to any man that was intended directly for him alone and was not merely a spontaneous working of natural agencies available for any one that might avail himself of it.

That is the nature of all these incidents in the Bible that are called supernatural. They are merely God doing immediate, personal acts to individuals. They are acts that are no more divine than the sunlight or chemical affinity are, but unlike those things they are acts not universal, continuous and general for all the world, but restricted to the one time, and specifically directed to some person or limited group. That is the feature that causes us to give them the name supernatural. And that really is the feature that gives them all their value (cf. Chapter II).

This supernatural in the Bible contains just the features necessary to constitute it fellowship in the fullest degree. It is composed of just the two most character-

istic elements that constitute ordinary fellowship. It consists of both conversations,—prophecy,—and favours,—miracles,—the very two things most characteristic of our ordinary human fellowships. If God is to give fellowship at all this is just the way we must expect that He would give it.

It is Fellowship for Fellowship's Sake

These supernatural acts are not primarily a means to effect something or to prove something. They are the very thing itself. The mother does not kiss her child to prove that she loves it or to teach it something, nor yet for any physical benefit it is to the child. It is not done as a means for something else. She kisses it because she wants to kiss it. The kiss itself is the object. It is the natural method of fellowship between the mother and her child. It requires no other explanation or justification. Whatever other benefits may or may not result indirectly from it, that is its essential meaning and value.

Just so the supernatural, both the favours and the conversation, is all just the normal, natural outflow of God's friendship reaching out and touching various men because God wanted to give friendship, fellowship and personal touch to them specifically. It is itself the important fact and itself the purpose and the object.

We ought to entirely dismiss from our minds the idea that God was doing all His recorded acts of kindness and helpfulness to people for the sake of some ulterior motive of teaching or elevating the world. That would be considering God as always "acting a part,"

and in a degree insincere. God is the most genuine and sincere being in the universe, and we misjudge Him if we try to attribute any of His acts of kindness to any ulterior and calculated motives. The personal kindness itself is always God's primary desire and motive, and any other beneficial results are entirely secondary and incidental.

This Supernatural Régime is the Basis and Substance of Religion

Just because these incidents have that meaning, the fact of their occurrence is a fact of enormous importance to us. All our religion is based upon that fact and grows out of it. We could not have any religion at all without these incidents, or without the belief of something like them or equivalent to them.

We could have Theology. We could have Ethics. We could have all that pertains to both belief and character. Those are things that are amply provided for by ordinary natural law in the evolution process. That is the proper source from which to expect to get help towards them. Indeed we have seen that we could not justify the thought of God doing anything supernatural directly and primarily for the purpose of assisting towards those objects.

But religion,—a felt sense of fellowship with God,—is something which for us grows directly out of our belief that God has done, and therefore may be expected to do, personal acts to individuals. It could not be produced in any other way.

And may we not surmise that the present tendency

in some quarters to drop that feature of real fellowship with God out of religion and make it solely and exclusively a matter of character and social service, is a logical and inevitable result from the denial or waning belief in these supernatural acts recorded in the Bible. This tendency, by the way, to so specially emphasize the features of character and service, we need not consider as something bad. No great movement that God's evolution process brings about is ever wholly bad. This tendency is to a large extent a distinctly salutary one. It will have enormous good results in the world. It has corrected a too mystical and selfish attitude which had come to characterize Christian life, and turned the direction of men's activities to the ethical and sociological work which was always intended to be their object.

But we need the heart and life as well as the activities. And the heart and life must consist in the religion of fellowship with God. That is something which our fathers got by firm belief of these friendship acts of God to men, and we may only get it again by return to the same source.

It is not too much to say that the paramount value of the whole Bible to us lies precisely in these parts and these features of it which we call the Supernatural, because they are the actual exercise on God's part of that fellowship with men which is the essence of religion.

Silent Fellowship

We may notice, however, that fellowship may be of two kinds. It may be active and concrete, or it may

be silent and passive. It may ordinarily consist of conversations between two persons and various courtesies and favours done by one to the other, but it may consist in the mutual consciousness of being present with one another, with nothing said or done. In that case, however, there must be the memory of conversations, favours or other personal acts and communications in the past, to make it real fellowship.

It is here that we find the great importance of the miracles in the Bible as a contribution towards our fellowship with God now. We may presume that the greater part of our fellowship with God now will not consist in spectacular or miraculous receiving of favours and revelations, but will be of this last named, silent kind, as when two persons are together in enjoyable companionship without any actual conversation or communications passing between them.

We know that God is present with us, and being so the remembrance of these acts of personal favour and fellowship to individuals recorded in the Bible enables us to have the feeling of real fellowship with Him. For though these acts were not done to us yet they were done personally to individuals like ourselves, and that enables us to have the feeling to some extent.

Now of course, on the other hand, it is true probably with most of us that this feeling of fellowship with God is greatly roused by the memory of certain conspicuous personal experiences of our own, as for instance at our conversion, or at some great deliverance or answer to prayer, when we have felt very vividly that God was with us and giving us a favour.

But here also there is no question that these special experiences of our own were really the result of the Bible Supernatural,—that it was the influence of these instances of personal touch by God to men recorded in the Bible which, consciously or unconsciously, contributed decisively to make it possible for us to have these experiences and to realize and feel that they were actually the work of God. We would never have been able to do so without the influences of that record, as we shall see presently.

Teaching Value of the Supernatural

This opens up to us the whole question of the teaching value of these supernatural acts. This question we can freely take up without embarrassment now that we have found an independent purpose for their occurrence which is quite in accord with reason and with all the evolution movement.

If fellowship with God is an integral part of the evolution process, and all the so-called supernatural events in the Bible are merely acts of fellowship by God to men, then these acts are all a normal and integral part of nature. They are inside of the evolution system when rightly considered, and there can be no possible objection urged against them either on scientific or philosophical grounds. Though somewhat rare and unusual they are just as normal and legitimate a part of the evolution machinery as magnetism, or earthquakes, or the first introduction of life, or any other phase of the great panorama of nature.

If then they are a perfectly normal part of the machinery of nature the way is freely open for us to estimate their teaching value and ethical use. Such an inquiry would be greatly embarrassed as long as we felt compelled to consider them special interpositions outside the evolution machinery. We would be obliged to ask in every instance:—"Is it reasonable that God should bring in this outside agency to secure this benefit and teaching when it might possibly have been produced by the agencies already provided in nature?" "Why, if He was infinitely competent, did He not provide in the first constitution of things a means to produce this good result as He did for so very many others?"

But now we are no longer confronted with that question. For these agencies are just as integral and legitimate a part of nature and the machinery of evolution as any other agencies. And it is therefore just as proper to look to them for desired results as it is to look to any other source.

We will find that these things to which we give the name Miracles or Supernatural events have a very distinct teaching and inspirational value to us. And the value grows precisely out of their specialness or so-called supernaturalness.

The whole genius of our religion and spiritual life is of the same essential character as this which we call the supernatural, and it needs the sight of these concrete, visible events to make real and credible to us much of our own inner, spiritual experience which does not have visible, material verification.

An Illustration

We may illustrate by a concrete and typical incident. A young preacher was recently appointed to a parish some distance down the seacoast. He planned and arranged to go there by a certain steamer. But some way he was delayed by farewell meetings and leave-takings so that he just missed the boat and it went off without him. That night that boat was wrecked a short distance down the coast, and nearly every one on board was drowned. That young man has always felt that being caused to miss that boat was a special favour intentionally brought about by God for him, and it has greatly increased and made vivid his sense of nearness to God and fellowship with Him.

Is it reasonable and correct that he should feel so? Those events all came about by natural and normal causes. The storm, the rock, the farewell meetings and lingering leave-takings were all perfectly normal and natural things. Why should he think that God had anything to do with them, even if they all did converge to produce a situation that was to him a very happy escape from death?

Or, to look on the question from another viewpoint:—Everything that occurs is ultimately the result of God's work. It was equally the work of God that when he walked by a mountain the cliffs adhered together by cohesion and did not fall and crush him, or that the waters of the ocean were held in their bed by gravitation and did not flow out and engulf him. But in neither of those cases is there any remote suggestion

of any conscious intention on God's part directed personally towards his safety.

Though there was rather a peculiar situation and grateful coincidence here, yet what rational grounds could justify him in believing that there was here, any more than in the other case, any conscious intention on God's part directed towards his safety?

We may answer that he could reasonably think so if he knew that *it was God's custom* to thus consciously care for individuals and intentionally arrange for favours to come to them personally. Or if he knew that God did such things for persons who were trying to live in fellowship with Him, and he was conscious of thus trying to live in fellowship with God. In that case it would be reasonable for him to believe that this was an instance of that same kind of thing that he knew had occurred in the past, and that it was, what it appeared on its face to be, a case of God really doing a personal favour to him.

Now these miracles of the Bible are all distinctly arranged to produce just that feeling and belief. In the first place they are, as we shall see, practically all acts of helpfulness to persons who were in some distinct relation of fellowship with God. In the second place they are so arranged as to conspicuously be seen to be God's work. Their most prominent characteristic is this specialness which marks them as God's personal acts. They are either things out of the ordinary course of nature or things specially predicted and promised beforehand. This specialness impresses that they are really acts of God's special intention, and they are thus

vividly felt to be God doing personal favours to specific individuals, and thus make us feel that that is a thing that God may be expected to do.

The great benefit, then, which the miracles bring to us in our present personal life, is to impress upon us and make us feel vividly that God cares personally for us as individuals and may be expected to do things specifically and intentionally for personal favours to us.

We need not stop to ask the question whether possibly men could not have learned this truth about God in some other way, by a philosophical induction from His perfection perhaps, or some other process. Whether they could or could not have gained that knowledge and feeling by some other process this is the process that God intended should produce it. And as we have seen that these miracles are just as integral a part of the evolution machinery as anything else, it is just as reasonable that He should plan that it be done by this agency as by any other.

Historically it is a fact that that is the way in which this feeling has been produced and ingrained in the Christian consciousness. It has come about by a long heredity of vivid belief that God did these acts of personal kindness to individuals recounted in the Bible and called supernatural. Even with those that doubt or repudiate all these miracles this same feeling is present in their hearts as an unconscious legacy from this same source.

This is not a new doctrine. Such has always been the feeling and belief of Christians, only we have not

always given it the frank recognition and prominence in our systems of theology which it ought to have.

Special Providence

It will be proper at this point to consider a possible wrong impression that may have been caused by the frequently repeated assertion that God does not interfere with the evolution process,—that He will never do a supernatural act primarily for the sake of teaching any truth, advancing any good cause, or making the world or any individual better. We have said that all these objects are the natural province of the evolution process and were all provided for from the beginning as God wished them to be provided for, so He will never do anything special now primarily for the purpose of furthering them.

Does this mean that there is no such thing as what we call Providence?—that we may never expect God to do any present act now for our help? Does it mean that our conception of God's present sympathetic, personal care over us and provision for us is a mistake? Does it mean that we are left entirely to our own resources in our efforts to succeed in life, and the thought that we have a heavenly Father, who takes a friendly interest in helping and directing us, is a delusion?

Does it mean that the world is grinding away under the sway of evolutional forces and natural law alone, and however much those laws and forces may tend to baffle, crush, and destroy us, God will look on indifferent, and do nothing to protect or help us? Is our conception that "God is making all things work together

for good to them that love him" (Rom. 8 : 28), and that we need fear no evil while He is near us (Ps. 23 : 4), merely a pious superstition? Are we left in all things absolutely to the results of the working of natural law?

Not at all. We have said only that God will never do a special or supernatural act *for the purpose* of making the world better, or for the purpose of advancing any of the work that natural law and evolution are engaged on. That is the "Manufacturing Process." God was competent enough to make machinery entirely adequate to perfect the manufacturing, and does not need nor intend to interfere to do any part of it by hand.

But that does not mean that He is never going to come into any personal touch with the product after it is manufactured and He takes it over for use. The use that He intends to make of this manufactured product—namely men—is to engage with them in the enjoyable interplay of social fellowship and friendship. Any kind of present personal activity by God or any help to us that would come under that category may be freely expected and looked for.

We have said that whatever special personal acts God may do they are never done *primarily for the purpose* of making the world wiser and better or effecting anything that natural law was established to effect. We were speaking specifically and solely of the primary *purpose* of the acts,—not of the possibility of such present personal acts, nor yet of their incidental results, but only of the formal purpose for which they were done. We have assumed that such personal acts are

done. The whole teaching of the Bible as well as the universal instincts of men assert that there are such acts,—that God does do personal acts and exert control for the benefit of individuals.

What we are insisting on here is that the motive for these acts is just a homely personal kindness to the persons affected. God's motive in it all is not "The Manufacturing Interests,"—making the world better, or teaching and training the race, but purely and simply the desire to be kind and companionable to some one, because it is a pleasure to Him to be kind and companionable to persons. That is a purpose and motive that, in our philosophy, we can justify. Any other we could not.

From the view-point maintained here we are right in feeling that God is personally controlling and directing things in our interest. We are right in feeling that with sympathetic interest in us He is constantly giving us help in our business and in our lives, removing difficulties and dangers, and effectively guiding us into the most advantageous ways. Certainly He does those things. And it is precisely the prime intention of all the discussions thus far made to show that He does do them, and that it is possible to do them without in the least colliding with the integrity of natural law and the evolution system.

Such personal care and help of God to the individual is not only possible and reasonable. It is the characteristic feature of this present era. This might indeed be called the era of religion,—the era of fellowship between God and men.

What we have been insisting on is that such personal help and care is not an amateurish effort to piece out an incomplete work, or an expedient to repair some damage that has developed. It is an entirely reasonable and integral part of God's one great plan, and has the same standing in that respect as anything else in evolution or natural law. For it is the very path that evolution was designed and intended to take at this stage of the progress.

Not Under Law but Grace

The declaration that "We are not under the Law but under Grace" (Rom. 6 : 14) has really far wider application than the mere matter of sin and punishment. It applies to our whole standing and treatment by God. It extends in a certain sense even to natural law. Natural law is still in operation, and we are still in contact with it, but we are not left under its unhindered dominance. We stand in such a personal, companionable relation to the one who established and is carrying on all this natural law that He will see that our personal interests are personally and sympathetically cared for quite irrespective of what would have ordinarily been the effects of natural law unhampered upon us.

Not less but much more than under the old interpretations may we feel God's personal care an actual factor in all our experiences and enterprises. Such care is not a special thing, an interposition, a side enterprise. It is just the appropriate condition of the stage of evolution at which we have arrived. It is just as

reasonable and natural for this stage as gravitation or reproduction in the previous stages of the process.

God is our personal friend now, and wants to do and will do for us everything that it is appropriate for a friend to do. That is the dominant fact of this era. It is something that takes precedence over all the claims of natural law, and to which even natural law must contribute. For He who is our friend is the author and master of natural law itself.

The only thing that conditions all this is that we really be in this relation of friends and companions of God. It must be a mutual affair. Friendship and fellowship must always be so. Only if we have definitely assumed that relation of friend and companion does it apply to us,—only in the degree that we are in whole-hearted friendship and fellowship with God. In as far as we are in such fellowship we can believe that it applies to us.

We can fully believe, then, that God is controlling and shaping events with personal reference to our individual happiness and well being (Rom. 8 : 28). Whether He is doing it by special interpositions or doing it inside of and by means of the course of nature which He established in the beginning, is a question which we do not need to discuss at all. From the standpoint of the great evolution system one way would be fully as reasonable and justifiable as the other. He is doing it in just whichever way His wisdom sees fit and convenient in each several case.

But He is doing it. And He is doing it not for the advancement of the world or the success of some good

cause, and not necessarily because of the intrinsic value of the results secured in all cases. He is doing it solely and specifically because He wants to do us kindness and wants to make us feel and enjoy His companionship. All such providences of God are entirely things done as acts of fellowship between friend and friend.

VII

PRAYER

CLOSELY allied to the foregoing, we must notice that the supernatural in the Bible has a most necessary and intimate relation to all our Prayer Life.

Prayer is one of the most fundamental offices of religion. We may count it the most essential of them all. Where there is prayer there is religion. Where there is not prayer or something that is its equivalent, there may be excellent ethical culture, sociological effort and theological acumen, but there is no religion,—at least none in the sense in which we have defined the term here of fellowship with God.

Prayer Implies the Supernatural

It would not be difficult to show that the reality of our prayer life is dependent almost entirely upon a feeling which we have derived, consciously or unconsciously, from the miracles in the Bible. Prayer to God would be meaningless without the belief and the feeling that He takes a sympathetic interest in the individual and definitely gives him personal and specific help. Just to impress that very feeling is the one great value of all the miracles to us and really those miracles are the only known facts that definitely de-

clare that God does give personal interest and help to individuals.

In as far as any prayer consists of petitions or asking for things it implicitly expresses a desire that God would do something aside from what the ordinary course of nature left to itself would effect. Every such prayer is therefore really a request to God to work a miracle. We may not expect or call for any visible, physical miracle like healing the blind or turning water into wine, but a manipulation of purely mental and spiritual forces by God for us would be just as much an intrusion into natural law and as truly working a miracle as multiplying the loaves or stilling the tempest.

It is a naive kind of ignorance to overlook this fact, yet we do overlook it, and we have a feeling that it would be unscientific to imagine God doing a physical miracle in these days but quite legitimate to imagine Him doing almost anything in the mental sphere. The mental sphere and the physical sphere are both equally parts of nature, and equally governed by natural law. For God to exert any influence whatever in either sphere directly for the personal interests of any petitioner would be just as much a supernatural event and a miracle as any of those that are recorded in the Bible.

Some people try to avoid this conclusion and still retain a province for prayer by saying that God does not give any concrete response but we get comfort and benefit by the mere seeking for and contemplation of His sympathy. But that can only be legitimate if

God does really give personal sympathy to us individually. If He does not our belief is superstition. If He does, there is no difference in principle between that and His sending manna from heaven to feed us.

We must remember that mind is just as natural and integral a part of this universe as matter is. The states and interactions of mind are just as much the subject of natural law as the activities of oxygen or electricity. It would be just as much an irruption into the natural working of the system He had made for God to give spiritual encouragement and uplift to a soul by His personal sympathy as it would be to still the winds of Galilee or heal the leper by a touch.

Even those parts of our prayers that do not consist of petitions but merely of thanks, confession or other kinds of fellowship, almost equally require the feeling that God takes a sympathetic interest in us personally. For us to approach God in any personal way implies the belief that He may be expected to make an equally personal response of some kind, or at least take personal, sympathetic notice of us individually.

Thus all our acts of worship of every kind in some degree imply the belief of God doing something outside of what is included in what we call nature and natural law.

As Christians we believe that this expectation is well founded and that God will do such things. We believe that in answer to prayer He will give substantial favours, not only sympathy and mental and moral help, but actual physical help and favours as well. We have gotten this feeling not from philosophy or

reasoning but from the supernatural acts and supernatural teaching contained in the Bible. One great value of all the supernatural acts recorded there is precisely to impart that idea and make it vivid and real to us.

One of the great values, then, of all these miracles recorded in the Bible is to let us see instances of God doing things personally for the sake of some individual, in order that we may get the vivid feeling that it is plausible to expect Him to do such things for us, and so our prayers may have reality in them to us.

Answers to Prayer

It ought not to be necessary to pause particularly to consider the customary objection that all such answers to prayer would be unreasonable,—that it would be unreasonable for God to depart from the wise course of events He had originally planned and follow some other plan that we conceived and requested. Or that it would be unreasonable for God to have resort to a special act or miracle to bring some good to some one whom He wished to favour, when in His wisdom He could just as well have planned from the beginning for that benefit to come to Him spontaneously and naturally.

This objection quite mistakes the meaning and purpose of prayer. The purpose of prayer is not to enable certain privileged persons to get some special benefits, nor to enable them to have the satisfaction of having events transpire in accordance with their wisdom and their wishes.

The meaning and the purpose of prayer is fellowship with God. That is what prayer is. That is its main and primary purpose. It is not a means to something else, but is itself the end and the desirable object, and the benefits given in answer are a means to the prayer. It is prayer itself as fellowship with God that is the valuable thing which God desired to produce, and the promise of good things in answer to the prayers is merely a means He employs to induce men to engage in the exercise of prayer, that is to say to engage in fellowship with Himself.

Since all prayer to be acceptable must contain the provision: "If it be God's will," we might say that the only things God may be expected to give in answer to prayer are things that He considers to be desirable and best, that is to say things that He might otherwise have made part of the result that nature would produce spontaneously, but in order to induce men to engage in the fellowship of prayer He planned that those things should be contingent on our making a specific request for them. Really both the prayer and the granting the thing asked for were contemplated from the beginning.

God from the beginning, in planning the course of nature, we may conceive, arranged so that certain desirable things should be held back and not produced naturally, in order that He might bestow those things personally and specially as a sort of bait to induce men to come and enter into personal fellowship with Him in the form of prayer. Prayer is not fundamentally a means to acquire certain good gifts, but the prayer it-

self is the thing of chief value, and the good gifts are the means to induce us to engage in it, and thus have fellowship with God.

Now in order to have that effect we must really believe that God will give personal favours to us personally. And as we have seen, the great means to inspire that belief in us is the sight of these instances in the Bible where God did give special personal favours to individuals.

Thus we see that the supernatural in the Bible is of supreme value to us in that it makes possible to us the prayer spirit. It makes valid and reasonable the whole institution of prayer, and thus enables us to wholeheartedly engage in it, and in so doing we enter into the blessedness of fellowship with God, which is the very heart and essence of our religious life.

Intercessory Prayer

There is another very interesting question connected with this subject of prayer. For we will find that even the validity and reasonableness of certain kinds of prayer is quite dependent upon considerations growing out of this matter of our fellowship with God.

If our conception of the supernatural and of God's personal attitude towards us is correct we would be able to account for God's giving good gifts as personal favours to us in response to our requests. But there are certain forms of prayer that still present serious difficulties, for instance, "Intercessory Prayer," and such petitions as:—"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." How can we reasonably petition and ask

for something that is not a personal benefit to ourselves but merely is for the improvement of the world, for the advancement of God's cause or for the help of some one whom we pity,—but whom we know God pities and wishes to help far more than we do?

We are told, for instance, to make intercession in prayer for the suffering and needy around us,—to pray that God would give them the help that they need. Why should we do so? Does not God know of their suffering and need? Do we need to inform Him?

We say we pray because we pity them and therefore ask God to help them. But do we have to persuade God to help them? Does He not also pity them far more than we do? Will He not want to give them the help without our urging Him to do so? Are we so much better and more sympathetic than God that we have to be touched with sympathy first and then arouse Him to sympathy and help?

We are told to pray for some one in order to bring down God's blessing upon him. Why? Does not God love him and want to bless him far more than we do? Why is it necessary for us to pray and urge God to do something that He specially wants to do?

Especially is this apparent when we pray for the conversion of some friend, or pray that he may be kept from going into sin. Does not God want him to be converted and saved far more than we do? Did not Christ come from heaven and give His life that that man might be saved? If God can do anything more to insure his being saved will He not surely do it? Why will He be any more apt to do it after we have

asked Him than before? Why should He wait for us to ask Him to do something to effect a result that from the beginning He greatly desired and which He has already shown the intensity of His desire for by the very great work and suffering already gone through to effect it? If there is anything more He can do will He not certainly do it without our asking, and if there is nothing more He can do why should we ask Him?

Or perhaps we can present the difficulty in another way by asking:—How can we justify God holding back and not doing certain good things which He might do, and which would produce good results in accord with His purposes?

For instance, our Christian teaching represents God as desiring the salvation of men, planning for it and going to infinite expense to make it possible. A little special work of His Holy Spirit at a certain time would accomplish the desired result with any given man and bring him to salvation. But God declines to do that little work, we are told, till some one prays and asks Him to do it.

After having already done so infinitely much to accomplish the result He declines to do the one little thing that will make it all effective until some man prays and asks Him to do it, then He does it. In the case of unnumbered thousands He does not do it at all just because no one has asked Him specifically to do it, and so all His great past work goes for naught.

Does not this tend to reduce the whole matter to merely a sort of stage play? Is not this whole con-

ception a mistake, and is not all such prayer unnecessary because God will, without our urging, do all that He can do for the salvation of all men?

One of the most common petitions in public prayer is for the success of Missions and the conversion of the world. But how can we reasonably justify a man making such a request? That was the great object on Christ's heart in coming into the world. God desires that far more than we do. Is it not impertinence for us to urge Him to do something for it?

If we were personally engaged in that foreign mission work we perhaps might reasonably ask Him to bless our own work and make it successful. But when we ask for the whole work in all the world, with a very large part of that work we have not even a remote connection. How then can we without impertinence make a request to God that He would work faster in that work and more quickly finish it? He is interested in the hastening of it a hundred times more than we are. He cares for the welfare of these perishing people a hundred times more than we do. If there is anything He can do to hasten their conversion and salvation will He not certainly do it? If He cannot do anything more than He is doing why should we keep asking Him to do more?

Our Prayer Makes the Thing Possible for God to Do

The logic of that reply is correct. We must believe that God cannot do any more for the salvation of the world, or of any individual, than He is already doing.

To doubt that would be to doubt the "God so loved the world."

We cannot ask Him to do anything more than He is doing except on one certain condition. We cannot ask Him to do anything more in the matter *unless the very fact of our asking Him will make it possible for Him to do something He could not otherwise do.* That is a startling proposition to make but it is a proposition we cannot avoid if we candidly face all the facts we are taught about God's love and relation to men. God cannot do certain things without our prayer, and He can do them after we have prayed for them. How can this be possible?

We sometimes use this form of words meaning it merely in a hortatory sense. We mean merely that God wants us to make the request and is voluntarily delaying the gift or act until we do make it. But this must mean very much more than that. For it must be that He not only tentatively delays doing the things in question but that He actually cannot do them.

Here during the past nineteen centuries more than fifty generations of men have gone down to death without certain help that we ask God now to give. Loving them deeply, that He did not give them that help at any time must surely have been because He could not. He would have given it if He could. We cannot think He delayed giving it and let them all go down to death just to hold up a little inducement to-day to our prayer spirit. That would make the whole matter monstrous.

We must either believe that there is nothing more

possible for God to do for men's salvation, or for any good cause, and so our praying for it is vain and unreasonable, or we must believe that our praying for a thing may make it possible for God to do something that it was not possible for Him to do before. How can such a thing be?

We must turn to science for the solution of this fundamental enigma of prayer.

Immutability of Natural Law

The one thing that science most insistently teaches us is the immutability of natural law. Science asserts this as an empirical induction, and philosophy and theology put the same truth on the firm foundation of God's infinite knowledge and competence. God knew what the world would become when He created and constituted all things, so He did it knowingly. If He had wanted anything to be different He could and would have made provision for it at that time. Having made what He wanted to make He has no inclination or design to interfere to change any part of its working. The great system of natural law is the system God ordained for this world. It is His will that that system should have unhindered right of way.

True this view leaves many problems difficult to reconcile. There is evil in the world and suffering and failure. There are many things we wish were different and much we long to see improved. Still perhaps if we had infinite wisdom we might be able to see that the world, on the whole and in connection with the interests of the whole universe, is really being

conducted in the best possible manner after all. Or we might see that for God to interfere for the purpose of changing His original plan or making anything work differently from what the original plan would effect, would be the cause of far more evil than the good produced.

But whether we can fully explain and justify it or not, the fact remains. Natural law is of God and He respects it. He ordained the world to be governed by the system of natural law which He constituted for it, and He will never discredit or repudiate that first arrangement which He ordained.

We must accept, then, fully and absolutely this teaching of both science and theology, that the laws of nature are inviolable,—that God never will intrude or interfere directly for the purpose of doing anything for the bettering of the world, since that is the province of those laws. And to say that He will not is the same as saying He cannot. That motive and purpose can never lead Him to do any present special and personal or supernatural act.

This is the only tenable ground on which we can stand with regard to God as the creator and governor of the world. And it is precisely from that standpoint that we first become able to understand the need and the legitimacy of intercessory prayer. From that standpoint it all becomes quite plain and logical.

From that standpoint we can see on the one hand why it is that God does not do various things to insure the improvement of certain people. He will not interfere with the world that He has made. It is the set

tled determination of His will that nature,—the world as He constituted it,—must run its course unhelped and uninterfered with. God never will do anything special for the purpose of making the world or any person better. To do so would be just as contrary to His fixed purpose as to arbitrarily change the orbit of a sun or blot out a world and make it over again. We can thus see that God cannot normally do any of these things that we are asking Him to do in intercessory prayer.

The question then to solve is:—How is it possible for Him on the other hand to do them after we have prayed for them if it was impossible for Him to do them before? The answer to this lies right along the line of this one great topic which we have been discussing.

Doing a Thing Asked for Becomes a Matter of Fellowship

We have seen that God does do special acts as acts of fellowship. He will do special acts for the sake of kindness or fellowship with some man, though He never would do such acts for a merely utilitarian purpose. Here is a project, let us suppose, that would require a special act of God. Merely for utilitarian reasons He never would set aside natural law and do that act. But some friend of God asks Him to do that act as a favour to him because it will give him happiness. It has now become a matter of personal favour and fellowship between God and that man. So God does that act as an act of favour and fellowship to that

man. He does not do it to make the world better or for any utilitarian benefit but solely to give pleasure and show friendship to that man, His friend, even though it does incidentally serve some utilitarian purpose.

Fellowship with men is a motive for which God considers it proper to do special acts. As we have seen, that is one of the distinct designs of God, looked forward to and prepared for by all nature and the evolution process. God might do from that motive acts whose results or by-products would make the world better, even though He never would have done those acts merely to make the world better as their main purpose. He could do acts if they were done as acts of fellowship which He never would have done for any other reason.

Answer to prayer is an act of fellowship, and therefore it is a motive for which God would consider it proper and possible to do special acts. God might, for the purpose of answering the prayers of persons that were living in close fellowship with Him, do any act He chose, because it would be an act of fellowship. The act might make the world better or convert some man, but yet it is not done primarily for that purpose. It is done as an act of fellowship to the man who requested it, to show kindness to him and make him feel that God is his friend. That is its main purpose, and the benefit to the world or to the other individual is merely a by-product or secondary result.

Of course the only sense in which we could say that God could not do any act would be the sense that there

was no adequate motive for doing it. The motive to make the world better would not be a legitimate one that could apply at all. Doing a special act primarily for that purpose is not in accordance with His will. But if doing a certain act would become an act of fellowship to some man then that would be a legitimate motive to do that act, and God could do it where He could not do it before. He might freely do from one motive an act which He would not do from another motive. The act acquires a different character. It becomes a different matter with quite different implications.

To make a very humble analogy:—A sick nurse on duty must not for her own pleasure spend her time playing games or driving in the park. But if it were done for the benefit of her convalescing patient then it would be quite proper for her to do it, even though she herself also would get pleasure from it.

Just so the exigencies of the world's progress might seem to call upon God to do certain things. But He could not comply and do them for that purpose any more than the nurse might play to amuse herself. It would be contrary to established law to do so,—in both cases alike. But suppose a man in close, loving fellowship with God asks Him to do those same things as a favour to him because it would give him pleasure. The fact of this man having asked in that way makes the doing of those things a matter of kindness and fellowship with him. God therefore might freely do those things for that purpose, even though it did bring the result that the exigencies of the world's progress

called for and though He could not do them primarily for the world's progress.

Very possibly all the above may seem to some to be merely a piece of speculation and casuistry. Still as long as opponents insist on making these speculative objections to prayer it is well to be able to meet them and show that we are logical and sound. It is plain that in this way we do have a complete and satisfactory answer to this problem of intercessory prayer. We can see how it is not merely a figure of speech but a real fact that there are things which God cannot do before we have prayed for them which He can do when we have asked Him to do them, and our praying for them actually enables Him to do them. Our praying for a certain thing makes God's doing that thing become a favour to us. It makes it become an act of fellowship, for it is an answer to a request, and thus is a purely fellowship act. God can do that thing as an act of fellowship, though He could not have done it otherwise.

Of course it is quite possible in fellowship to do favours that have not been specifically asked for. Yet they must be things that are specifically desired or they are not favours and it is not fellowship. All our desires *should* be lifted up to God in the form of requests and petitions. That is God's design in the whole institution of prayer, and we are explicitly directed to do so (cf. Phil. 4: 6, etc.). And so it is quite logical if He should have it fixed that the favour would not be granted till the request was actually made.

Illustrations

We may illustrate the matter with some concrete examples. A ship is in a great storm on the Mediterranean Sea (Acts 27 : 14 ff.). In the ship are two hundred and seventy-five men, paralyzed with fear and looking for certain death. God knows their danger and terror, and He pities them. He has also known of countless other cases of terror and suffering both before and since then, which He did not help. He has pitied them and suffered in sympathy with all these sufferers, but by the wise determination of His own will He has made it impossible for Himself to in any way intervene for their relief. He counts it necessary that nature should freely run its course, and so He has had to leave them all to the free operations of nature.

But there was one man in that ship, the Apostle Paul, who had long been in a relation of intimate personal fellowship with God. Paul, with the confidence of a friend, was asking and looking to God for the safety of his life, and also for the safety of all these others "that journeyed with him."

This made the matter of saving the people in that ship a matter of personal favour to Paul, God's friend. It was now no longer a matter of interfering with natural law to save some lives, but a matter of fellowship with a friend, which is emphatically in accord with natural law. And so God could and did do it. He did it for Paul's sake, not for the sake of the two hundred and seventy-five others. He did it to be friendly to Paul, not primarily to save their lives, though it did save their lives.

King Hezekiah was attacked in his capital city Jerusalem (2 Kings 18 : 13–19 : 35) The mighty Assyrian army was near at hand, both able and eager to destroy the city and forever blot out the Jewish nation as it already had the tribes of Israel to the north.

The nation of the Jews has played an important part in the history of civilization, and their destruction at this time might have delayed for centuries the progress of the world. But we cannot conceive of God on that account intervening to save the nation, and for that reason. It would be violating natural law. To do so would be to confess incompetency in His original constitution of things, and to admit that He had not been able to arrange for progress to go on spontaneously quite as fast as He would like to have it.

But there was another factor in the situation. Hezekiah had been for a long while walking in specially loyal, trustful fellowship with God. It was entirely in accord with both the great world plan and God's will for God to carry on the fellowship with Hezekiah by granting him favours that he asked. Hezekiah asked for deliverance from this enemy, and God granted it to him as a *favour to him.* Thereby the nation of the Jews with its enormous value for the world's betterment was preserved though that was only a by-product.

Doubtless Hezekiah's motives were not altogether selfish. He may have desired the deliverance not altogether or chiefly for his own safety. He may have loved his nation and desired to see it safe. He may have foreseen how much his nation would con-

tribute to the progress of the world and have desired that. These and other things may have entered into the cause of his desire, but it was his desire, and God granted it, not because of the benefit to the nation or to the world, but because it was the request and desire of Hezekiah, His friend.

That is the only reason that could justify God interfering by such a personal interposition. For we are assuming for the sake of the illustration that it was a supernatural or personal interposition of God that brought the deliverance in both these cases. He sent the special deliverance solely because it was the request and desire of His friend, and He could not have done it otherwise.

Let us again suppose, for instance, that the vast and venerable nation of China were in the throes of a great agitation. Will it issue in disaster or in reformation and advancement? The question comes up of praying to God to exert influence to avoid disaster and lead to good results. If God were to specially exert some influence upon the minds of certain men or do some other special thing, the disaster would be averted and good results ensue.

But without our prayer or any other consideration to justify it, it would be unreasonable to suppose that God would ever do a special act for that purpose. It would be interfering with natural law. The great nation of China was moving and would move just as He in the beginning had provided that it should move. To interfere by a special act now to improve something or prevent some result that would have naturally en-

sued would be to declare His first provision inadequate.

But you have desired and prayed to God for the salvation of China. Simply as an act of favour to you He might legitimately do the thing that would turn the tide towards China's uplift, just as He might do any other thing you desired as an act of favour to you. It would all be purely a personal matter of favour to you.

Whether so great an act as that would not be quite out of proportion to your importance and unseemly as a favour to you, is another question. But if God thought it a suitable favour to give to you it would be entirely in accord with His established ways of working to do so.

As an act of fellowship and favour to you He might comfort your mind, He might cure your sickness, He might make your enterprises prosperous. All these would be recognized as appropriate acts of favour to be granted for fellowship's sake. And equally as a favour to you, if you desired it and it would be a real favour to you, He might bring influences to bear that would result in the conversion of your friend, the uplift of your community, the salvation of China, or any other good thing whatsoever,—only provided it was a thing you desired and the doing of it would be a specific favour to you.

That He should do such things merely to make the world better, because it was not getting better as fast as He wished, would be unreasonable, and would stamp His original creation act as inadequate. But that He should do any kind of personal favours for fellowship's

sake is an entirely different thing. It is no reflection on the adequacy of the original creation for Him to do any kind of favours whatsoever as favours. This was contemplated and provided for in that original creation system,—indeed we might almost say it was one of the main purposes of that creation.

Thus we see that prayer is a reality. It is a real power. It is not merely a ceremony pleasing to God, a spiritual exercise, a devotion. It is one of the real powers and efficiencies of the universe, just as much so as electricity or gravitation. It is something that has power to bring about results that could not have come about without it any more than planets could revolve without gravitation or flowers bloom without sunlight. It is in fact, as it has often been called, a lever that can move the world, for it can enlist and open the way for the infinite power of God.

Not the new, attenuated definition of Spiritual Calisthenics, but the old conception of "Wrestling with God" is the definition of prayer that most nearly fills the requirements of our modern science.

Laws of Prayer

If this is the meaning and the value of prayer we can determine to some extent the laws that will govern the answers to prayer. The whole matter must be subject to the laws that apply to ordinary friendly fellowship.

With one of the parties to the friendship so infinitely great it may seem venturesome to compare it with our ordinary friendships, and yet what God does is per-

fect,—perfect in its minuteness as well as in its completeness. If He deigns to grant friendship and fellowship at all we may be sure it will be in no way less companionable and sincere than the most perfect of our human friendships and fellowships.

We are considering now only the granting of favours for fellowship's sake. In the first place the prayer must be a sincere expression of a real desire, or there is no reason at all to expect the request to be granted and the thing given. When friend talks with friend we often in ordinary fellowship say a great many things merely for form's sake, for politeness and because it is customary to say or ask those things under the circumstances. If the friend is accustomed to the ways of the world he understands that perfectly, and pays no particular attention to those requests, except to count them at their true value as merely polite talk.

A pretty large part of the prayers of all Christians can be blocked out entirely under that head. Doubtless God is not offended but possibly pleased to have us be polite towards Him and say or ask things just to be social. But we surely must concede Him as much discrimination as our ordinary friends have.

We may fix, then, as the first rule, that the value of any petition to bring an answering favour depends in the first place on the strength of the real desire for that specific thing. If you pray for the reformation of China or the conversion of your friend, the only efficiency in your petition will grow out of the amount of real desire in your heart for those objects.

It will not be governed by the fervency or the ur-

gency with which you make the petition. It will not be governed by the intrinsic goodness and desirableness of the thing asked for. The only factor that will have value will be the degree of desire you have for that thing,—the degree in which its granting would be a personal favour to you.

It may be that the reformation of China would be a grand good thing and would bring benefit and happiness to millions of people. But you have no right to advise God to do it on that account. But if it will give real pleasure to you personally, then, because God is your friend you can frankly and confidingly ask Him to bring it about, and just in the degree that it will cause you personally real happiness He will be disposed to do it in response to your request.

Of course we suppose it gives you pleasure because of the pleasure and happiness it would give to these millions of other people, and your heart goes out in sympathy to them. But we need not go into that phase of the question now. The point is that all the value your prayer has in the case is the amount of personal favour the result would be to you, for whatever God does in the matter in answer He is going to do solely as a favour to you.

This seems an extremely strange statement to make, but we have seen that there is no other ground on which God could do such things without throwing discredit on His original creation. He could only do such things on the ground of friendship and fellowship for some one.

The second rule is that God will act in the case in

the capacity of Friend, not of servant or agent or instrument or anything of that kind. When friend makes a request of friend that friend is entirely free as to whether he shall grant it or not, otherwise it is not a matter of friendship but something else. But on the other hand the whole force of his friendship will impel him to do that thing as far as it is feasible. And just in proportion to the strength of the friendship between the two persons will the request be likely to be granted, other things being equal.

So on the one hand it will be no reflection on the validity of prayer if the requests are not granted in any case or in any number of cases, even cases that seem in the highest degree deserving. For the friend must be entirely free if it is to be really an act of friendship.

But on the other hand the whole force of the bond of friendship between us and God will impel Him to do the thing desired. And we may assume that the more strong and intimate that bond of friendship becomes the more result there will be from our prayers. The efficiency of our prayers will not be measured by such things as our ability and earnestness in service or even our holiness, except as they are an index of the strength of our personal bond of friendship with God.

VIII

PUNISHMENT

WHAT about the severe and sterner parts of the Bible? There are many cases of threatening, punishment and destruction recorded there, especially in the Old Testament. If we claim that the supernatural and all the movement of the Bible is an enterprise by God to draw men into fellowship with Himself by giving friendly, companionable treatment to them, does not this contradict that claim? Fellowship should consist on His part in favours, friendly companionship and conversation. Sending suffering, punishment and destruction seems more like the office of a stern judge and moral ruler. Is not that the attitude in which God most characteristically stands, at least in the Old Testament?

Certainly that seems to be the popular impression and men contrast the loving Saviour of the New Testament with the stern, just judge and sovereign ruler, God, of the Old Testament. Even though they consider it all the same God, and the representations consistent, they consider that the New Testament is intended to exhibit the loving, forgiving side of His nature, and the specific province of the Old Testament was to prepare us for this by first teaching us His inflexible justice, wrath and punishment of sin.

But we are assuming here that religion is fellowship with God, and that *all* God's movements of a personal nature recorded in the Bible have that for their object, namely, to win men into fellowship. The purpose to give fellowship is the only motive that could justify supernatural or personal acts and teaching. All the supernatural acts and teaching of God in the Bible, then, must be done as acts of fellowship.

Here seems to be a contradiction. How are we to reconcile these two conceptions? Or is that popular conception really a mistaken one? Is it possible that we may find that after all the movement of God in the Old Testament no less than in the New is a movement entirely of favour, kindness and helpfulness, and all of it such that it can be properly considered a contribution of Divine Fellowship?

Manufacture and Use

In order to determine this question we must take a somewhat broad and analytic view of God's various kinds of activities.

We say that evolution and nature is all ultimately God's activity. It is His activity as Creator. It is His enterprise of making things. It is His great manufactory in which He is manufacturing all things, including man. This is God's process of manufacturing man. Now we shall see presently that all punishment belongs in and is part of this manufacturing process.

But things are usually manufactured to be used. God manufactured man to use him, and one main use

was for the purpose of engaging in fellowship with him. The manufacturing and the using are two distinct things. The manufacturing is ordinary nature. The using is fellowship, and includes all the supernatural of the Bible. It is religion.

It may be the same person that manufactures that also uses. Also He may begin to use the thing before the manufacturing process is entirely completed. But yet the manufacturing and the using are clearly distinct things. We must consider them just as separate as though it was a different person using the thing from the person who was manufacturing it.

If we will keep this distinction clearly in mind the whole matter will clear itself up. For we will find that the great bulk of the punishments and judgments portrayed in the Old Testament are not things that are a part of the fellowship movement at all. They are not supernatural facts or supernatural acts. They are things that came about in the natural way by natural law. They are merely facts predicted or referred to in God's conversations or messages, just as He might refer to any other conspicuous and important things.

Really in these stern severe incidents the supernatural feature is merely the fact of God giving the conversations and messages,—the fact of His speaking to men about these things. That is distinctly a matter of kindness and friendliness. That is an appropriate method of fellowship, even though the things thus supernaturally spoken of may be severe and painful facts.

These severe and painful things spoken of are not

themselves parts of the fellowship. They are merely the subjects of the conversation. In themselves they are part of the manufacturing process. They belong to that department of God's activity. For they are things which when they do take place take place entirely by the course of natural law.

In the few cases where a punishment did come by a supernatural act we shall see that really some other purpose was the main, fundamental motive of the act, and the punishment was merely a means to effect that purpose, or a result from it (cf. Chapter VIII, pp. 258 ff.).

Punishment All Belongs to Natural Law

This manufacturing process, commonly called nature or evolution, is strictly and essentially a reign of law. Law is one of the most important features of its apparatus. In the mechanical and chemical sphere the law is compulsory and effectively produces the results. In the sphere of life, which in its very essence implies some degree of free will, law does not absolutely compel, but visits some evil on the individual that does not conform. This is equally true of all the various functions of life,—the merely physical ones such as growth, reproduction and action, also the mental ones such as memory, reason, invention, as well as the sphere of ethics, character and duty. In this last sphere we call it punishment.

All this reign of law is part of the order of things established and provided for in the first institution of nature at creation. It is all provided for in the one great manufacturing system that punishment or penalty

must follow everything that is not according to the law's standard. In all the greater part of the process we can see that the penalty automatically follows the collision with the law. We can see this in the physical sphere, the natural mental sphere, and to some extent we can see it in the ethical sphere also.

It is true that to a certain extent in the ethical sphere it is not so apparent. We cannot so clearly see that punishment there always automatically follows breach of law. And yet we feel compelled to believe that in some way it does do so, and that it must all be as fully and as naturally provided for there as elsewhere. The punishment in this sphere as in all the others is intrinsically a part of the apparatus of the manufacturing process, for its purpose is the elevation and discipline of character. We feel that certainly not some but all of that apparatus must have been provided for along with everything else necessary, in instituting the great evolution process. It is hard to believe that there should have been some little minor inadequacy that had to be personally provided for from time to time.

In saying this we do not mean at all to imply that the punishment of sin must necessarily and always be an automatic result of the sin itself. It may or may not be so. It may be a distinct volition and impulse of God at the time for each person. But for all we know gravitation or electricity may be so too,—a distinct volition and present impulse of God in every case of activity. There are some theorists that claim that it is. We know nothing whatever on that subject.

We must leave that phase entirely out of our consideration.

What we must believe, however, is that God in the beginning instituted a great manufacturing system complete in every respect, with full and appropriate provision so that suns should attract each other, electricity should flow, and sin should be followed by punishment. It was all equally and fully arranged and provided for some way from the beginning as all one unified system. It was the one fully endowed manufactory and this is all the process of manufacture.

If then this is the manufacturing process and all fully provided for, we cannot conceive of God doing any present supernatural act primarily for its sake. Just as we cannot conceive of God doing a supernatural act primarily for the purpose of teaching or improving the world, so equally we cannot conceive of His doing a supernatural act primarily for the purpose of punishing, for that too is part of the manufacturing process which He provided fully for by natural law. All punishment must find its means within the evolution system, in natural law. Any supernatural act by God primarily for the purpose of punishment would therefore be excluded. If we should find any such acts in the Bible we must frankly say we do not know any way to justify or account for them.

But is this so? Is infliction of punishment, then, no part of religion? Is it true that supernatural acts in the Bible were never performed for the sake of punishment? Doubtless this is quite the opposite of the popular conception on the subject. It seems to be a very

common popular conception that punishment is one of the most prominent and fundamental factors of the Christian religion.

It must be admitted that it has been so used in the past by Christian teachers. The doctrine of future punishment has been much used as a compelling incentive to lead men to a religious life. Much of the revolt against religion in recent years has really grown out of a revolt against this supposed feature of it. The antagonism has been largely aroused by this doctrine and its supposed implications.

In many minds there has seemed almost to be the crude conception that God had specially organized all this system of future punishment directly to force men to accept a position of submission to Him, and to coerce them into offering Him the worship which He desired to receive. This was what the whole system of religion seemed to be in their minds, and they rebelled against it.

In more educated circles the revolt took the form of an entire denial of the reality of future punishment. Unfortunately for this view it is contrary to the analogy of all nature. There is nothing in nature or evolution that gives any ground of hope for a future life of glory and happiness for all men irrespective of character and conduct. The whole lesson of evolution would be that if such a destiny were to be experienced it could only be for a selected special part of the race. And as far as it would give any indication at all it would be that the reprobation of the remainder would be final. That is the analogy of all the rest of the evolution process.

But to say that punishment and future reprobation is a fact is far from saying that it is a factor of religion. It is a fact of *nature*, just like fire or poison or storms or death. And God's attitude in religion towards it is precisely the same as towards any one of these others. The fact that in the Bible, even in God's supernatural messages, there is much said about it does not alter the fact that it belongs distinctly to nature. In the supernatural ministry of Jesus there was much connection with disease, disaster and death, but that does not alter the fact that disease, disaster and death belong wholly to natural law.

The relation of God in religion and in the Bible movement towards punishment is precisely the same as that of Jesus towards disease. He warns against punishment that is impending and does much to ward it off, but the punishment itself is entirely a matter of natural law, and belongs wholly in the one great evolution system of nature.

Punishment Only a By-Product in the Supernatural

The infliction of punishment is no part of religion, and God will never do a supernatural act primarily for the infliction of punishment. But on the other hand, this would not necessarily mean that God might not do something for some other purpose which would incidentally entail suffering or loss upon some man, even in such a form that it might properly be rated as punishment.

For instance He might wish to befriend His friend

and deliver him from danger, and He could best do it by destroying the enemy that was threatening him. This would be primarily an act of friendship and therefore of fellowship, even though it did inflict great suffering, and even though it inflicted the suffering on bad men in such a way that it might be rated as punishment for their sins. The act of friendliness was the primary purpose in the case, and that would be an act of fellowship.

In the second place, fellowship implies conversation and commerce of ideas. We certainly expect that the conversation of God will be something profitable. Thus we are prepared for all kinds of profitable teaching and communications, provided only the primary motive and purpose is the fellowship,—is to do kindness and give help thereby. This would cover all cases of warning and threatening of punishment by the prophets and others. It would account for by far the largest part of all the references to punishment and severity in the Book. And if all punishment is a part of natural law it is just as much an act of kindness to warn of that as to warn of fire, flood or any other great natural calamity that might be impending.

Again, the most efficient way to give the warning may be, not by words but by giving some example of the calamity actually consummated or of the punishment actually inflicted. This would open the way to account for any instances in the Bible where a supernatural punishment was inflicted on any one for a warning, as, for instance, in the case of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6 : 7), or of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10 : 1, 2). In these

the primary purpose was the warning to others and not the punishment to these men.

Instances of this class, however, will be found to be very few. In most cases where a punishment is held up as a warning, the punishment itself is something that comes by natural means, in the course of nature, and it is only God's foretelling and warning about it that is supernatural. Conspicuous examples of this would be the Deluge (Gen. 7 and 8), a familiar geological phenomenon, and the destruction of Sodom by a seismic eruption (Gen. 19 : 24–28). The only supernatural parts were God's foretelling and His helping His loyal friends to escape. Of the same character, also, are all the many calamities and sufferings recorded to have come upon the nation of Israel and on various individuals on account of their sins and in accordance with God's warnings. It is all natural punishment supernaturally foretold.

It will be found that the principles above stated cover all the cases where punishment is associated with the supernatural in the Bible. Either (1) the main purpose of the act was kindness and help to some one, and the suffering or punishment inflicted merely as a means to that or a result from it, or (2) the punishment was sent as a salutary warning, or (3) in far the greatest number of cases the supernatural part is merely the warning and foretelling of the punishment, and the punishment itself is, like all ordinary punishments, entirely produced by natural causes under natural law. Thus in all these cases the supernatural part has entirely for its object some kind of helpfulness and friend-

liness to persons on whom God is thereby intending to bestow friendship and fellowship. It is therefore an appropriate method of God's bestowing fellowship upon men. We are correct therefore in still claiming that all God's supernatural acts were done for the purpose of helpfulness, friendship and fellowship.

Punishment by God

But after all does not the Bible teach that it is God who sends the punishment?—That God is the moral governor and judge, and that He will punish sin? Does it not teach that He will punish and destroy wicked men?

Certainly it does, and that is a very important part of its teaching. It is a fact that God is the moral governor and will punish sin, just as it is a fact that God is the creator and has arranged so that every one that goes into the fire will be burned, and every one who falls from a high place will be bruised. These are all equally and alike facts, but they all alike belong in the sphere of nature, of evolution, of God's great enterprise of making and perfecting the world. They all alike belong in the "Manufacturing Department."

We are not at all implying here that law, judgment and punishment are not facts, and like all other facts the work of God the creator and moral governor. They are extremely important facts, and facts that bulk large in the communications or conversations that God has with men. We may freely admit that a very considerable part of the Bible is taken up with impressing this fact that God as moral governor will

punish sin and destroy the wicked. That is a fact just as true as that "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." And it is a fact of essentially the same character and *in the same department of His work.*

But even though all these things are truly the work of God, yet what we are insisting on here is that they all belong to one certain department of His work,—the manufacturing department,—and God has another enterprise and another relation to men besides this relation of manufacturer, ruler and judge. He has a relation of fellowship and companionable intercourse and all His supernatural acts belong to that relation. It is this relation and enterprise exclusively that is the purpose of the Bible record and that constitutes religion. All that He does of a personal or supernatural character as recorded there was done in pursuance of that enterprise and for fellowship's sake.

Whatever may have been the subjects of His conversations through the prophets, the conversations themselves were carried on solely as a matter of helpfulness, fellowship and friendly good will. And it is the fact of these conversations being held, not the things talked about, that is the thing that may properly be rated as supernatural, and that is the thing that is a contribution to religion.

Punishment, therefore, does not ever figure as the primary purpose of God in any supernatural act recorded in the Bible. All the supernatural acts in which God personally does something to specific men have definitely for their main purpose some kindness

or benefit. We can therefore still feel confidence in asserting that the whole Bible movement, Old Testament as well as New,—the whole religious propaganda,—is a movement of fellowship designed to draw men into a state of friendship and fellowship with God.

It may be that the subject of Punishment is more frequently broached in the Old Testament and that the New Testament moves mostly in a more benignant atmosphere. For the New Testament is the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, and its theme is to portray the ideal relations between God and men appropriate to that higher life; while the Old Testament has the more homely task of letting us see God taking men as they are and trying to enter into helpful relations with them. But the heart of God is the same in both cases. In spite of all the sin, stubbornness and desert of punishment which that Old Testament finds among men God still continues steadfast in His yearning kindness and friendship towards them. That is the Gospel of the Old Testament, and is it not a gospel that is still needed by the world to-day?

IX

GENESIS OF CHRISTIANITY

WHAT about the claim that all religions, including Christianity, have had a natural genesis in the ordinary evolution process, and there is no difference between Christianity and the others in that respect? that it must be considered on the same plane as all the other ethnic religions?

We have seen that fellowship of men with God seems to have been one of the great goals of the evolution progress, and so in that sense our Christianity as well as everything of that nature in all religions has an integral place in the evolution system, as has been already pointed out. But something more and different from that is involved in this claim.

It is claimed that the origin and genesis of all religions, like that of all other mental disciplines, is simply the mind of man reacting on the facts of experience and observation. The beliefs of religion are merely the deductions or inferences that men have gradually made from things observed and experienced, and from aspirations spontaneously springing up in their minds in perfectly normal, natural ways. It is claimed that this is true of Christianity just the same as of all the other ethnic religions.

It is claimed that our religious beliefs are the result,

not of divine testimony and revelation, but of inferences from immediate human experiences. We find much in the doctrines of other religions, both ethical and theological, that is the same as or similar to things in the Christian system. We do not consider that these other religions got these doctrines by divine revelation, but believe they got them by reasoning and inference from the facts of human experience. If so, why should not the same doctrines in the Christian faith have been derived in the same way, in spite of the fact that they are recorded among the things communicated by God through prophets or in other ways?

From this it is but a short step to the claim that not only did these beliefs found in the other religions originate in the Christian religion in the same way that they did in other religions, but everything else in the Christian religion also originated in the same way.

Ethics, Theology and Religion

In order to consider this problem intelligently we must have accurate definitions to work with. There are three separate things that are very commonly confused and joined together under the one name Religion. The first of these is Ethics or the discipline of character and conduct. The second is Theology, or philosophy and knowledge about God. The third is this to which we have here restricted the name of Religion, and which consists of the practice of fellowship with God.

It is the common custom to make the one word Religion cover all these meanings, and there is no harm,

perhaps, in doing so, provided we recognize clearly and keep in mind that they are three quite separate things.

As to the first two of these we need make no demur. It has been the assumption all through these discussions that these first two departments, Ethics and Theology, belong wholly to evolution, natural law and the efforts of men's minds working on the facts of experience. They are matters of knowledge, and knowledge is something that should always be entirely supplied from ordinary natural sources. We cannot believe that God, having made such an enormously wide range of knowledge spontaneously available to men through nature, should have fallen just a little short of making all available that was necessary, and that He had to resort to special supernatural interposition to supply the little remainder that was lacking.

The knowledge systematized as Ethics and Theology, then, should be wholly knowledge derived from natural sources. True, as we have seen, God might for independent and appropriate reasons do personal, supernatural acts now that would contain suggestions and teaching as to His nature and will for man's conduct, and this would be a source from which we would get knowledge and ethical training also. He might for fellowship's sake make actual communications and revelations. But this does not contradict the claim that all our knowledge should come from natural sources, for all these fellowship acts must also be counted natural sources. They would be just as integral a part of nature as any other of the more common observed facts and laws since that fellowship is an integral part of

the one original evolution scheme. It would be just as legitimate and logical for knowledge in the line of Ethics or Theology to be drawn from these sources as from any other, and we could still say it was all derived from natural sources.

Main Purpose of the Bible is Not to Reveal Knowledge

It is indeed possible that knowledge from such special communications may have contributed to any or all of the ethnic religions as well as to Christianity. It is the belief of their votaries that it did, and we have at least no particular interest in combating their claims.

And yet it is remarkable what a surprisingly small proportion of such knowledge, even in the Christian system, was really derived originally from such supernatural communications. It almost seems as though God were intentionally honouring the great school of normal knowledge which He had established by making His revelations in such a way as to interfere as little as possible with the habit of relying on ordinary sources for all our knowledge. *It is not the purpose of the Bible to make new revelations of ethical truths directly by God to man*, and really very few comparatively are made there.

Unquestionably there is a large amount of both ethical and theological truth in the Bible. Even in the Old Testament we find very much of such truth given in supernatural communications by the prophets and others. Not only our theologies but our systems of ethics as well draw largely from material found in the

Bible text, and the Bible has always properly been used as the most effective handbook for such teaching. But when we come to examine more definitely, how much of it, especially in the Old Testament, will we find was really new revelation of truths unknown until the time when it was given? A surprisingly small amount of it, at least of the ethical teaching, can justly be credited as of that nature.

Take the most conspicuous and noted instance of all, the Ten Commandments, said to have been directly given by God with an audible voice to the people (Ex. 20 : 1–17). Unquestionably they are very important and fundamental matters, but there is no new revelation of ethical truth there at all. To kill, steal, lie and covet, perjury, adultery, honour of parents,—surely all of these were topics that were not new to ethics then. Even the seventh day Sabbath was an old institution. There is not a single ethical principle enunciated there but what had long been known and acknowledged, and most of them had been the very basis and commonplace of the ethics of all the nations from the very dawn of history.

When we turn to the theological side we find only a less degree of the same fact. The belief in one supreme God was not a new thing in the world then, nor the thought of the impropriety of representing Him by material images. Moreover from this side we can see what really was the purpose and meaning of it all.

It was not a revelation of teaching but a *Revelation of God.* In its very form it purports to be that, for it begins with the ordinary, conventional formula of a

formal introduction:—"I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, etc." (Ex. 20 : 2). If we were to compare it to human movements it is much like a man meeting another with whom he wishes to get on friendly terms, introducing himself by name and by other identifying circumstances, and then proceeding to converse with him with appropriate commonplaces of edifying conventional talk.

It was that personal touch with God that was the important thing rather than the intrinsic value of the things said. And His adding all the weight of His personality to all these important and recognized moral laws was the real ethical value of the incident.

And what was true of this was true of practically all the rest of the ethical and theological revelation by prophets and others in the Old Testament. For the most part its essential purpose ethically was to put the weight of God's personality and all the pull of the bond of affection between the people and Him on the side of things known by them to be right and against doing things known to be wrong. Not to reveal new rules, principles or facts that were not known before, but to get them to obey known truths was the purpose of it all.

Setting aside the purely local matters of details of government and religious ceremonial collaborated by God with Moses and others, there are in the Old Testament really very few great ethical, or even theological, principles of general application, revealed that had not already been evolved and formulated by men long before. So that the fact of these things being made

the subject of revelation,—that is to say, used by God as topics of conversation,—does not at all affect the fact that their original genesis was reason and experience, and they were truths that had already been worked out by men in the ordinary, normal, evolutionary way.

This same fact is illustrated from the other side in a striking way when we turn to the New Testament. In the sayings of Christ there are quite a few ethical and theological teachings that with more justice can be classed as new or real revelations. There is the command to love our enemies, the universal fatherhood and real universal love of God, and a number of other truths. These things have been written in our compendiums and formally recited from the first, but for centuries they had no place in the practical and actual belief of the Christian world. And to some of them we have not even yet fully attained. They have only been able to gain the measure of acceptance they have by the slow process of evolutional growth.

It is still further illustrated by the fact that even the theological level that had been attained and upon which Christianity took its rise was lost as soon as Christianity spread and tried to carry its doctrines to nations where those doctrines had not been naturally evolved. When the Christian religion came to be generally adopted by the Gentile nations where the evolution of doctrine was less advanced than in Judea, it soon was changed into a practical polytheism, veiled indeed by Christian names, with saints and apostles in place of the minor gods, but none the less real poly-

theism of much the same grade as that which obtained in the localities before its advent.

It may seem unreasonable, but it is the historical fact that all systems of truth must come by growth, and cannot be delivered and assimilated ready made. That is really the only way that beliefs can arise and win acceptance at large.

If we apply this principle to the Bible and the older phases of our religion, many of the difficulties will disappear which have caused acute friction among modern religious scholars. We need have no compunctions in recognizing that in spite of the large amount of special divine revelation given, the old Jewish ethics and theology developed just as naturally and under the same evolution agencies as the ethics and theology of any of the other nations. It could not have done otherwise, according to what history has shown us is the way truth spreads.

Genesis of Fellowship

But when we come to consider the third element, and that which we have defined to be the real essence of religion, fellowship with God, the problem is somewhat different. That is not something merely learned, but something done. And it is essentially a mutual thing. To be real and genuine there must be contribution from both sides,—something done by God just as necessarily as something done by men.

When we consider the matter from God's side and His bestowing fellowship or personal friendship it is evident that differences might arise which would make

one religious cult so far superior to all others as to be the only one to be considered. Indeed we must normally expect that there would be such radical difference. Personal friendship is always an exclusive matter. In its very essence it consists in giving to a certain individual a personal consideration and interest which is exclusively for him in distinction from all others. If we use the word "Friendship" in connection with God at all we should give it its proper, essential meaning. Personal friendship and benevolence are two distinct things, quite different both in nature and origin.

Benevolence may be wide or universal in its scope, but friendship, on the contrary, the deeper it is the more it tends to limit its circle. Moreover though a man may have many friends yet the friendship with each one of them is just as separate and distinct as though he were the only one to whom he was giving friendship. So a high state of friendship with one man does not at all imply an equal state or any state of friendship with some other man, or indeed with any other man. It would not contradict the law of friendship at all, then, if there were a radically different state of friendship by God with the Jewish race than with any other race. He has benevolent love for all, but a high state of personal friendship there would not logically imply a similar state nor indeed any friendship at all with any of the other nations.

We need not stop here to define the causes that might lead God to bestow special friendship on this one race. They may be definable or they may be causes

wholly in God's own mind of which we have no means of knowing. The causes and beginnings of our own friendships are often very obscure. But if He did thus single out one race for special, personal friendship and allow the fellowship there to grow and develop into something radically higher and different from anything in any of the other nations He was only following the natural laws of friendship as we always see it in human relations.

If religion is merely ethics developed under God's benevolence with nothing more, it might indeed be hard to see why there should not be at least some degree of parity among all the religions. But if, as Christ declared (John 15 : 15), and as we are maintaining here, religion is a state of personal friendship and fellowship with God, some one preëminent bestowal of that fellowship, and so some one unique and preëminent religion is just what the laws of friendship would lead us normally to expect.

Our Christian tradition claims that there was such a special régime, namely, the personal friendship and fellowship bestowed by God on this one Jewish race. And while not denying the possibility of some acts or some degree of fellowship bestowed elsewhere, it claims that the personal fellowship bestowed here was something radically different from and higher than that bestowed anywhere else. And still more, and most significant of all, it claims that this régime culminated in a great act wherein God Himself became man in the person of Jesus Christ, and associated on equal terms with other men, thus bestowing the fullest degree of

fellowship possible. That was the culmination of this one régime of fellowship, and certainly that constitutes the line with which it is connected something immeasurably higher than any other and altogether in a class by itself.

Evolution Specializes

Or if, on the other hand, we take up from man's side the matter of man achieving such a fellowship, even from that side it would not be unplausible to suppose that some one race might come to engage in a special measure of fellowship with God so much higher than that of any other as to be quite in a class by itself. Here also the laws of evolution give us no ground to assert that all religions must be equal. Because the Christian religion rose from the same origin and was naturally evolved the same as all the others is no reason to demand that no radical difference can be claimed between it and the other ethnic religions. True this fellowship which is its essence is a living something which must follow the laws of all biological evolution. But in evolution the same genesis and the same method of development do not at all imply equality in the resulting products.

All biological evolution proceeds by the same methods and from the same origin. And yet one product of it, man, is so incomparably much higher than all the rest as to be wholly in a class by himself, and practically the only significant result of the process. It need not then be thought strange if the evolution of religion has produced a similar unique result, and perhaps in a somewhat similar way.

For instance it is supposed by many that when the line of descent from which man came had reached a certain critical stage, perhaps by achieving articulate speech or some other faculty, a number of causes converged to both improve its character and to accelerate its rate of progress so that by a sort of "geometrical progression" it soon far outdistanced all others and became the only line to be considered.

We can easily conceive that the development of religion in some certain race might in the same way reach a critical stage when its progress would go forward in accelerating "geometrical progression" and soon far outstrip all others.

It is natural that it should do so, if religion is personal fellowship. Personal friendships always grow that way. Something starts a little special friendly interest between two persons, and immediately that friendly feeling, in the first place, tends to draw them more into each other's company with more opportunity for friendship to grow, and in the second place the friendly acts of each one stimulate greater friendly acts and feelings in the other, back and forth, at an increasing rate, till in a few days the friendship is advanced farther there than elsewhere by years of acquaintance.

Let us suppose that some body of people, as for instance the ancestors of the Jewish race, in some way, perhaps through more correct conceptions of God's character or through some free initial kindness of God, got into a slightly higher state of friendly, confiding responsiveness towards God than the rest of the world. The difference though slight may have been critical,

and both the principles above referred to would immediately operate to increase it. In the first place this new relation would naturally cause more frequent occasions for the bestowal of fellowship by God. And in the second place the favours on His side and the confiding trust on theirs would more and more stimulate each the other to more and more such trust and favours, on and on with increasing intensity on both sides. It need not be long till the bond of fellowship there would be so far beyond that elsewhere as to be the only one to be considered.

Whether this alone was the process, or whether, as is probable, a number of causes and processes may have converged to contribute, certainly it would be but following the ordinary law for such a friendship once begun to grow special and exclusive. It is the nature of friendship thus always to specialize out certain persons for preëminent intimacy, and it is the law for a special relation once formed to strengthen and intensify. And so the friendly relation of God with this race and His acts of friendly intercourse with them would naturally become radically different from that towards any other race.

God a Typical Friend

Now if this be in some degree the right interpretation of the Old Testament history it would indicate that God but did what every man naturally and spontaneously does in forming his friendships. It would mean that God by the usual and natural process had developed and engaged in a relation of special

friendship. It would mean that God's friendships are of the same kind and arise and grow in the same way that our friendships do. It would mean that this friendship and fellowship with God which is the essence of that precious thing we call our religion is not some mysterious, transcendental thing, some formal ecclesiastical bond, but something that acts in the same way and is in the fullest sense all that the cordial, homely friendship of our other friends is, and it would mean that God may be expected to act towards us in the same way that any other true friend would.

That this is really the value of the Old Testament movement is not at all contradicted by the fact that in the Bible narrative the later the era the stronger are the denunciations of sin and apostasy. That is precisely the effect we should look for. It is just the natural result to expect as the bond of friendship becomes closer with the nation and its demands on the individual correspondingly more exacting. We must bear in mind also that it is not the whole nation but only the faithful portion of it, be they many or few, that God looks upon as the people with whom He is having the fellowship (cf. Rom. 9:6, etc.). In the end, though the Jews of Christ's time had many fatal faults and had the misfortune to be under the control of vicious ecclesiastical leaders, yet they were conspicuous in this one element of whole-souled and unswerving loyalty to Jehovah. It was because there was thus such a high level from which the mission could take its departure that Christ was able to send His religion out into the world with efficiency. And we may notice that when

after Constantine it suddenly spread widely and became submerged in the common life of the general world it took over a thousand years for that religion to again get back and attain anew that same level of purity and loyalty which it had already attained among the Jews.

It would be ignoring the most evident lesson of evolution, then, to say that because Christianity has had the same genesis as the other religions, and all have developed by the same method of growth, therefore we cannot claim any critical superiority for it over any of the others. The lesson of evolution would lead us to expect quite the opposite result. The lesson of evolution is that though there may be many advancing lines there is one only that has reached the top, and so only one that has real significance.

If religion be fellowship it is evident that the ordinary working of the laws of evolution upon it, instead of making all religions of the same value, would inevitably tend to specialize on the one most suitable race, and make the relation of fellowship there,—that is to say, make their religion,—radically higher than that in any other race, make it as much different from the others as man is from the lower animals,—as close friendship is from mere conventional acquaintance among men.

Among religions, as among animal species, though there may be many that have had the same genesis and the same method of development, and though many may have made vast development in various directions, yet after all we may logically expect that there will be but one that will have permanent significance and ultimate value.

PART II

The Old Testament

I

PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE

BEFORE we take up any detailed study of the Old Testament and the rest of the Bible it will be very important to get a clear and correct conception of just what the Book purports to be.

Let us take a parallel case. Here is a book that bears the title, "ALGEBRA." It looks externally not unlike other books. But when we begin to read it we find, along with ordinary text, something entirely unexplainable from the standpoint of good literature. We find letters combined in such a way as to make no words with any sense at all. Moreover we find other characters used that are not letters at all and are never found in ordinary literature. We may find such anomalous combinations for instance as:

$$a^2 + 4a\sqrt{x^2 - y^2} = (m + n)(m - n)$$

and others far more strange.

If we tried to interpret the book as merely a book of ordinary literature,—philosophy, logic or something of that kind,—we might define such combinations of marks and letters as "supernatural." They are something entirely outside of all the natural laws of good literature, and contain features that are not found in literature at all. We might say that either it was a blunder of the typesetter, or some later hand had med-

dled with the forms and mixed up the type. Such mixed up and strange combinations of letters are not only meaningless and valueless but are a blot upon an otherwise logical and edifying treatise. Just so men say all these things of the supernatural accounts that are found in the Bible narrative.

We know, however, that this book is not a book of history, logic or anything of that kind but is an Algebra, and that such combinations of letters and special characters are always found in Algebras. Indeed in an algebra that sort of combination of letters and algebraic symbols is the important and essential part, and all the common, ordinary letter press is merely auxiliary and explanatory. What if we should find that in the Bible too this was true,—that the supernatural incidents and supernatural features were really the essential and the important part, and all the history, poetry, teaching and all the rest, were merely the setting and the background.

A Biography

What is the Bible? What is the Old Testament? Is it merely the religious history of a race which had peculiar genius for religion? If so it is an historical work of extreme interest, well worth a place beside the best works of Herodotus or Strabo. But if that is its nature, to look to it now as in any sense a moral guide or standard would be absurd. The embellishment of such a book with strange and spectacular supernatural accounts would give us no trouble indeed, for that is just what we expect to find in such old books. But we

would get rid of the burden of the supernatural by giving up the whole traditional religious value of the Book.

Is it an illustrated handbook of moral and religious teaching? The prophets were stern, holy men, preachers of righteousness. The histories hold up to us the inspiring examples of such heroes and saints as David, Samuel, Moses, Abraham and a brilliant array of other greater and lesser lights. But there is not one of these men but in the very brief account of his life there are things that would be condemned by even the blunted conscience of modern popular thought. Surely the enormous influence for good which the Bible has exerted cannot be accounted for on that basis.

But according to the assumption which we are following here the Bible is neither one of these. We shall find that it is a history indeed, but it is not a history of the Jewish race. It contains much moral instruction indeed, but it is not a handbook of moral rules and models. It is a book with a hero indeed, but the hero is not David, or Moses or any other of the list.

The Book has one hero and only one. The hero of the Book is God. The history is a history of God. It is a narrative of His acts and enterprises. It may appropriately be called a book of the biography of God. It is a history of one of His important enterprises in this world.

It is a history of religion, but not of how men learned and discovered a high standard of religious truth. Religion is not something that is made or learned but something done. It is a mutual social relation. It is

fellowship between God and men, and the Bible is the account of God doing on His part the acts of fellowship which were to inspire in men a responsive feeling of trust and fellowship. It is the history of God's great enterprise of religious propaganda, by which He was to establish, and eventually spread throughout the world, the true religion, which consists of enlightened and sincere fellowship with God.

Nature of a Biography

The biography of a man is not made up entirely of accounts of things he did. It must give the setting of those acts. A complete biography of Bismarck, for instance, would bring in the history of the whole German Empire and of half the other countries of Europe. But still it would be strictly a biography of Bismarck. Just so, this biography of God brings in the history of the whole Israelite nation and of many men and events in other nations, and yet it is strictly a biography of God, and is to be estimated and interpreted on that basis.

It is not a biography of God in all His activities, but just in this one enterprise of inaugurating among men a condition of religious fellowship with Himself. It is a history of His religious propaganda. It will only bring in outside facts as they are related to that enterprise. It will not primarily show God in His general, universal activities in nature, but in His personal, friendly dealings with individuals and specific groups of men.

But such personal dealings of God with individuals

are just what constitute the supernatural. As we have seen, it is precisely the accounts of such things in the Bible which are called by that name. This supernatural part, therefore, must be the main thing, and the heart of the whole.

Instead of considering the supernatural a burden, something we feel called upon to justify and would be glad if we could get rid of entirely, it is the real, central meaning of the whole Book, and all the rest is merely auxiliary to it. Instead of considering it a questionable embellishment of the message, it is the message itself.

We may notice, by the way, that this is really the traditional feeling and the estimate the devout Christian consciousness has always had, and which it was trying to express by calling the Book a Revelation, and "The Word of God."

II

ISRAEL

THERE is one problem which lies right across the path of our study, and that is the question why one single nation, the nation of Israel, should be presented as the sole recipients of God's favours. It is the representation all through the Bible that the Israelites were a people that stood in a special relation to God, that God looked upon them in a peculiar light, granted special privileges to them and special religious teaching. Indeed that practically all of God's supernatural discipline and religious propaganda for the world was given in this one nation.

This is too obvious and prominent all through the Book and too fundamental to the whole meaning of the enterprises recounted to require any detailed references. The Book has even been familiarly called "The history of God's chosen people" or some term of that nature.

But any such specialness of any one nation or people before God seems entirely contrary to our modern conception of God and of His universal love for all the world. How can we possibly account for His giving, not merely once or twice but continuously all through their history, such special favours to one nation which He did not give to any other, and count-

ing them in a peculiar relation to Himself which no other nation had?

This whole idea has been confidently challenged as merely a mistaken conceit of the Israelite historians. They imagined that Jehovah was specially favourable to Israel, just as other nations imagined that some other god who was their patron deity was specially favourable to them. It is claimed that the whole idea of any specialness or special relation to God must be denied, apart from the special genius for religion which seemed to be their racial characteristic. Everything in the Book that is based on or grows out of that idea of a specialness must be rejected, even though that does necessitate an entire recasting of our estimate of the Book and of its place in religion.

We could hardly deny the justice of this conclusion if religion is merely a species of moral culture, or if it is merely a means to enable men to get into heaven, or indeed a *means* to anything else for that matter.

If religion is merely a process of men striving upward into the light we might admit that the Jewish race had more genius and ability in that direction, and so made more advance than the other nations, but not so much as to make them the sole and only ones to be considered.

If religion is merely a matter of knowledge of God, of His will and of the way to escape punishment and get into heaven, it seems strange that God should closely confine the bestowal of that knowledge to one little obscure people, and not in some degree at least make a bestowal of it on all the rest of the world.

But it puts the whole matter in a different light entirely when we come to consider that this whole Bible movement is not any of those things but something quite essentially different. It is not something done for teaching or training or any other ulterior object. It is simply a course of personal fellowship engaged in by God for fellowship's sake. It is God seeking to make certain men His friends and companions, just as we approach certain persons with friendly advances because we wish to give them our friendship, to make them our friends and to get their friendship and companionship to enjoy.

The whole movement to which we now give the name of Religion is a movement by which God is inaugurating a state of friendly fellowship between men and Himself,—something that He contemplated and looked forward to from the very beginning, and which in one sense the whole evolution process was a means to make possible and to provide subjects for.

The evolution process,—the great manufacturing enterprise,—has at last produced a product suitable,—a race of beings of high enough capacity to be capable of affording that social fellowship which God desired. God now proceeds to begin it. The whole Bible supernatural story is the account of some of God's movements to that end. We must judge it entirely from that standpoint. Our only criterion in judging it must be to consider what is customary with men in seeking to inaugurate and carry on friendship and fellowship with other men. We must consider it normal that God should proceed in substantially the same way that

men would for a similar purpose. On larger lines, perhaps, and with appropriate variation of details, but yet in essentially the same way.

Specialness a Necessity

How then will God begin to enter into this personal, companionable fellowship with men, and win them to reciprocate it? Not by teaching and training. That is not the way we make our friends. Not even by goodness and general benevolence. That would not effect it. It must be by bestowing personal friendship itself. Benevolence is an entirely different thing that is often confused with this, but from which it must be carefully distinguished. A man's goodness or benevolence is an entirely different thing from his personal friendship. It is a state of mutual personal friendship which we consider is now to be inaugurated. God's goodness and benevolence had been in exercise from the beginning.

Benevolence is normally something broad. We expect it to include as large a number as possible in its bounty. The nature of friendship is just the opposite of this. Its strongest expression is the most exclusive. In all cases it must be with definite individuals. Its restriction to the specific individual is what constitutes it friendship and fellowship instead of merely benevolence.

A man may, indeed, have many friends, but his attitude towards each one of them must be as separate and personal as though he were the only one so treated. The very essence of friendship and fellowship consists

in making the individual feel that you are giving him a consideration that is special to him in distinction from all others.

This being so, it is plain that this religious propaganda, since it is entirely a fellowship matter, could not be general to all the world but must be restricted and personal in order to be really friendship and fellowship.

Of course when considering the relations and acts of God the term Individual may be expanded to include a restricted group so unified as to feel like a unit or individual in relation to the rest of the world. This would be especially true in ancient times when the nation was more largely than now the real, practical unit in all things. A family or small nation conceiving itself to be descended from one ancestor might especially be so considered.

For various and obvious reasons God's fellowship dealings might be expected to be with such larger units or groups quite as much as with the single person. But it could not be general to the world at large. There must be this restriction to the individual or individualistic group in order to constitute it fellowship and make it have the effect of personal friendship on the feelings of the recipient.

If God then is to do this which is the goal of all the evolution process,—is to enter into the exercise and enjoyment of fellowship with men,—He can only do it by making the advances of fellowship not to the world at large but to specific individuals or to some restricted group of this character,—to some group so unified as

to have the feeling of individual or family solidarity, and it just happened that the people of Israel was the one He chose to use.

Friendship of God

We need, then, have no difficulty in seeing why God should have treated the Jewish nation in such a different way from any other nation, and made practically all His great supernatural manifestations to them. We can see that that is the only way that He could reasonably do such acts at all. It might have been this nation, Israel, or it might have been some other nation, but it must be some one nation singled out to give the distinctive special treatment to or it would not be fellowship at all.

Moreover friendship is not something to be given one day and taken back the next. It is not this nation to-day and some other nation to-morrow. Having once given His personal friendship to this nation of the Jews He remained constant in that friendship bond during all that nation's life. If it taught us nothing more the Bible history of Israel might teach us a valuable lesson in the sacredness of the pledge of friendship.

We have already noted how a relation of special friendship once formed spontaneously tends by its very nature to grow stronger and stronger. And as we shall find later, the whole course of the history follows exactly the lines which we recognize as the accepted code of friendship as it is recognized in human relations. At least it was so on God's side.

It began with a very congenial friendship between

God and one man, Abraham (cf. Isa. 41 : 8, etc.). In the course of their friendly companionship God gave the promise that He would continue a similar relation of personal friendship to Abraham's children and descendants (Gen. 17 : 7, etc.). That relation thus pledged God kept with scrupulous honour.

Because He stood in this relation of pledged friendship with this nation of Abraham's descendants, God did as acts of fellowship with them the long series of supernatural acts,—acts which could not have been justified on any other ground, but which were the natural and appropriate way for God to give personal friendship and fellowship to persons whom He chose to regard in that relation.

This fact, then, of the special relation in which God is represented as standing to the nation of Israel does not imply that the nation or the people were in any respect essentially different from the other nations and people of that age. It does not necessarily imply even that they were morally any better or any higher in their theological conceptions. It only means that if God were to begin to bestow personal fellowship He must have some specific people to bestow it on, and this was the specific people.

If His friendship was to have the satisfying genuineness that makes human friendships so precious, it must be constant and it must be personal and definite. God could only begin that régime of fellowship,—that great consummation for which all the evolution process had been preparing,—by selecting some specific people to begin the fellowship with, and these were the people

so selected. It might have been some other nation, but it must be some specific nation, and this was the specific one. This was the natural way and the only feasible way in which God could inaugurate His great religious propaganda of Fellowship with Men.

This representation of God standing in a special relation to this one nation of Israel is not a mistake. It is not a mere conceit of the national historian, a natural but groundless imagination. It was a fact, and a fact with most important meaning. It was, as it has always traditionally been considered to be, a fundamental feature conditioning all the enterprise which the Bible records. It was simply the best and the normal way to effect the object God had in view, namely, to make men feel that He could be a sympathetic friend to them individually.

III

ABRAHAM

THE supernatural in the Old Testament might be divided into three general divisions:

First, there are the Miracles, the specific acts and incidents to which we commonly apply the term Supernatural.

Second we may put Prophecy, including the continuous order of prophets spoken of, and the recorded writings of some of them given in the Book.

The third division would include all the historical and narrative parts. These are classed as supernatural on the ground that all through they aim to exhibit God behind the natural events, and the events themselves are chiefly significant as illustrating God's directive influence in human affairs.

Of course this is assuming the substantial correctness of the narratives, which some challenge. But we are here making our interpretation of the Bible confessedly at its face value and with the traditional estimate, to see if on that basis it can be justified. From that viewpoint we may include all this material as various forms or species of the supernatural.

We may take up, then, the first division, the concrete events,—the specific miraculous or supernatural occurrences recorded in the Old Testament.

Beginning of the Era of Religion

Though the religious movement of which we are the heirs began very far back in the morning of the race, it will be more convenient to begin our study with the time of Abraham, when the movement becomes more definite and observable.

It may be that the Adamic story given in the early chapters of Genesis is intended to portray the very beginning of the movement. As the genealogy in Luke puts it (Luke 3:38), "Adam was the son of God." That is to say, he was the first to stand in a personal, companionable relation to God. At that time God first began to deal with men in this relation of fellowship which we call Religion.

Up to that time the evolution process had not proceeded above the level of the merely animal. There were higher and lower animals, and that particular strain from which man was to descend had advanced very much higher than any other. They may have already developed all of the intellectual powers and faculties that distinguish man now. But yet in their relation to the creator God, and in His attitude towards them they were only animals and treated as such.

Religion as fellowship with God is something that consists of and grows out of definite personal acts of God to individuals. No such act had yet been done by God to any individual of this evolving species, and no intimation had been made to them or conception formed by them that any such would be done. Indeed that personal relation with God had not yet begun, and the species had not yet been given the right to come into

that relation. They were in all their relations, both in their bodily life and in whatever might lie to them beyond the bodily life, not any different from what the other animals are. They were exceedingly keen, shrewd, most marvellous animals, but yet from the standpoint of religion merely animals.

With the period which the Adamic narratives portray God began to give personal acts of fellowship to this species, or preferably to some individual or family of this species (cf. Gen. 4 : 14–17 ; 6 : 2, etc.), for fellowship is always with the individual. He made them aware that He would do so, and that He expected reciprocal feelings and acts from them, and thereby entailed upon them a new world of responsibility. Indeed they were thereby raised to a new level,—a new species. And membership in a higher species necessarily entails additional responsibilities and new conditions to be met if the individual is to thrive,—and the species persist.

Something like the above is what, from the evolution point of view, it is plain must at some time have been the state of the line of descent from which man came, and some such transition must at some time have been gone through in the course of the development of the race, if men have evolved from lower animals which had no such relation to God. And something like that would seem to be a possible meaning of these Adamic narratives or poems. From that time God began to give personal treatment to men. In other words, that was the date from which the era of the supernatural began. It was the beginning of the régime of religion,

and so the correct date for the beginning of the Bible history since it is the history of religion, or of God offering fellowship to men.

But the whole narrative, and the whole atmosphere portrayed, down to the time of Abraham, is so different from that of modern history that we may take the liberty to pass it over in our examination. From the time of Abraham the narrative proceeds more in the style and atmosphere of modern history, and we may commence at that point to examine the supernatural,—these incidents in it which are different from the natural incidents that we ordinarily find recorded in history. The religious propaganda is quite definite and concentrated from that time on, and for that reason also we may profitably take that as the starting point of the study of this which we have inherited as our religion.

How Will Fellowship Begin?

Let us suppose that God proposes to begin a régime of fellowship with men,—a religious propaganda. Or rather let us suppose He is entering upon a new stage, a more definite and systematic promotion of that fellowship régime. How will He go about it?

Fellowship is not something to be promoted either by teaching or by general benevolence. It is a mutual interchange of sympathetic companionship, and can only be promoted by doing appropriate personal acts,—the acts in which fellowship consists. It implies God doing something special and personal. Indeed under the circumstances it implies God taking all the initiative. Even among men where one party is very much higher

than the other, real fellowship is never established unless the higher party makes all the advances.

The movement had already begun with Adam, but with Abraham we are supposing that God designs to begin an important advance of that fellowship movement. Abraham was already the Sheik of a large tribe of several thousand persons (cf. Gen. 14 : 14). Their descendants would develop into a nation, and this nation was the one which God was to take to be the subject of this great movement in religion. He intended to so lead and develop them that they would respond to His advances, and that He might thus be able to bestow His fellowship and companionship upon them. That is the project God has in mind. What would be the steps that it would seem most natural for God to take to begin to bring it about?

It is plain that God's first task in beginning the great fellowship propaganda must be to lay deep in men's minds the feeling of God's friendliness and approachableness. That is the thing they must be grounded in first, for it is the one essential and fundamental thing. The other particulars, the feeling of His greatness, holiness, wisdom and the rest, can be gradually added at leisure, but that is the first essential, with which alone there could be fellowship, but without which fellowship would be impossible.

If that is the thing desired it would be hard to conceive of a better and more effective way to accomplish it than just such a course as is outlined in the Abrahamic narrative. It is all a narrative of simple, homely friendship. The expression is used that "Abraham

was called the Friend of God," and the converse of that is also true, that the whole tone of the narrative represents God as the familiar, congenial friend of Abraham. All the supernatural events recorded have distinctly that colouring. They all have one theme, namely, a powerful friend having occasional friendly dealings with His friend.

This is vividly illustrated by some of the incidents which otherwise seem hardest to understand and justify. When Abraham himself is acting in far from a high and noble manner the Friend is still loyal to him, as a friend should be. For instance, in the cases when his cowardly, deceitful conduct about his wife got him into trouble in Egypt (Gen. 12:11–20), and Philistia (Gen. 20:1–7), the Friend stood by him just as loyally as though he had been worthy of it, and got him out of the trouble.

It is hard to see how the attitude of God in such incidents as these could be justified on any theory that God appears there as moral ruler, or as teaching the way of a perfect life. He gives nothing but opposition and trouble to the Egyptians and Philistines who acted in all innocence, and nothing but help to Abraham, who was entirely to blame.

But if He is appearing merely as Abraham's friend, that is the only way He could do. That is precisely what would be required by the code of friendship, but something hard to justify on any other grounds.

Tutelar Divinities

It has been cited as indicating a low character for all these narratives, that Jehovah figures merely as the

tutelar or tribal patron divinity of Sheik Abraham, just as any other great sheik would have some patron divinity that he thought was specially favourable to him.

That representation is correct. God does so appear there, and He was just that and intended to be so. He must be that if He would be the kind of God that religion presupposes and requires. That instinct which led other tribes, communities or nations to believe in a tutelar divinity specially favourable to them, was a correct, because natural, instinct, growing out of the natural needs of the heart. It is that need that God by His true religion means to satisfy. That is really the very essence of our devotional religion to-day. It is personal friendship, and personal friendship is always something which is specific to the individual in distinction from all others.

Jehovah was to Abraham just what the tutelar divinities of other tribes were conceived to be to them, for that is something that the human heart needs, and it is the fundamental essence of religion. But His being that did not prevent His also being far more. God could be perfect man in Jesus Christ without interfering with the fact that He was also infinite God.

That is the key to the whole problem and one of the things we must not forget about God. He is great enough that He can do little things just as easily as great things, and exhibit Himself in small relations just as easily as in great ones. The first and fundamental relation in which He wished to exhibit Himself to men, as the basis of all their religion instincts, was

the relation of Friend, and that is the distinct character of all His relations with Abraham.

A religion whose God was a being merely of infinite power and wisdom would be sure to become a religion of abject fear, practically like those religions in low races which are called Devil Worship. If we add infinite justice and holiness it would but intensify the fear, for men have consciences. Even if we add goodness and general benevolence, it would relieve the situation very little. Our experience with *men* of that character, especially if they are very rich, high and powerful, is not very reassuring. Too often we observe that the more personally good and benevolent a man is, the more exacting he is in his criticisms of other people.

As a matter of fact it is the very hardest thing for men to get to feel that a very great and good being can also be very approachable, friendly and sympathetic. Even with the benefit of all the Bible teaching as to God's friendship and its concrete revelation in Jesus Christ, yet so hard is it to really feel it that through all the middle ages the feelings of men made it necessary to bring in the Virgin Mary as the real object of religious trust, affection and prayer, while God the Father, and even the incarnate Jesus were felt to be too exalted and severe for human comfort.

We can well see, then, why the first and most essential thing in launching the great propaganda of religion must be to take steps to get men well grounded in the feeling of the friendship and familiar sympathy of God. And that is just what such incidents as are

recorded in the Abrahamic narratives would be specially adapted to do.

Two Separate Relations

To make an analogy, imagine the case of some feudal retainer or court servant, who has come to be a special favourite with his king or lord. The king has a special fondness for him, and while he continues right on in the duties and dangers of his service, yet the king finds frequent occasion to meet with him as friend with friend and enjoy his society, as well as to favour him in various ways and stand loyally by him as his friend. That would be a fairly accurate analogy of this record of the intercourse of Abraham with God. It illustrates the fundamental essence of the religion which God wishes to have us practice, and in which He was beginning to train Abraham and his descendants here.

But we must note that while God's dealings with Abraham here, and with men generally in religion, are in the attitude of friend rather than of moral ruler, that does not mean that men are to act towards God only as a friend, and never give Him the treatment appropriate to a ruler. Even the court favourite must always recognize that the king is king. God is our Moral Ruler. That is an integral part of natural law. It is both natural and useful that men should treat God in that capacity. Religion does not advise men not to give God the obedience due to a ruler because it gives them the privilege of approaching Him as their friend. The two relations are not at all mutually exclusive or contradictory.

Even part of God's friendly intercourse as a friend with man may consist in teaching him the proper conduct towards Himself as Moral Ruler and Sovereign, and in taking suitable steps to get men to give Him that proper respect and treatment. It is really friendship and kindness to do so. The king would be unkind towards his favourite if he did not when necessary give him suitable advice and training in courtly manners and behaviour.

The fact of these two relations, then, is fundamental and important. While God does not in the least abdicate His position of Moral Ruler, with all its necessary duties and results devolving on men, yet He does approach and deal with men distinctly in the character of friend, with all the sympathy as well as all the privileges and amenities that our ordinary human relations of friendship imply.

If we keep these two principles clearly in mind we will be able to see a consistency and appropriateness in all the Old Testament narratives of God's dealings with men. And we will be able to see that by means of them the Old Testament does after all bring a most valuable contribution to religion, quite on the same level as the New Testament, and well worthy to be esteemed a revelation of God.

Always as Friend, Not as Moral Ruler in the Supernatural Acts

The supernatural dealings of God with Abraham consist first of a number of intimate, friendly interviews in which He makes him various promises, such

as the promise of a son, of possession of all that land, of numerous posterity and general prosperity in the future. In all these the attitude of God is represented to be that of a familiar friend, though in some cases He invests the interview with an air of mystery and solemnity suggestive of a supernatural being. In the interview about the destruction of Sodom this plane of familiarity is especially emphasized. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing I am about to do," He says (Gen. 18:17), as though it would be unkind to keep secrets from His friend.

It is the extreme anthropomorphism in all these accounts that in many minds has stamped them as being certainly mythological. But really it was just that view of God's character which it was the most necessary to impress at this time. It was the most important thing for the purposes God had in view that there should be this extremely anthropomorphic aspect in all these appearances. It was to fix indelibly in the hearts of this race the feeling of God's personality and of His friendly sympathy. Those are thoughts far more important for religion, at least at first, than the deeper truths about His wisdom, justice, power and other attributes. God considered them of such great importance that He became man in the person of Jesus Christ just to be able to impress those features and make men feel them.

These incidents, and others like them, did fix deeply in the hearts of this race the feeling that God was their friend, and could be trusted and leaned upon as a friend. They have had much part in producing that

feeling in all the Church down to modern times, and Christians who still have the old faith in the old Bible still get a good deal of their feeling of the reality of God as a sympathetic friend from these same old stories. It is rejecting all this part of the Bible as spurious or mythological that has had much influence in bringing many Christians to lose their vivid sense of God as a present sympathetic friend, and to make religion to be merely and solely a matter of character-building and social service, with God retained in it chiefly as an ornament,—a sort of President Emeritus, retained for the prestige of His name.

Certainly such stories as these do have the effect of making God seem near and sympathetic. Children, for instance, who believe in them implicitly, do get from them a vivid feeling of God's reality and His friendliness. Those who consider them fiction would admit that as fiction such stories would be precisely calculated to rouse in their readers such a feeling.

If men could be wise enough to make up fictitious stories suited for producing that feeling, is not God wise enough to make the real thing for the same purpose, if the purpose is important enough? It is no more task for God to make the real thing than it is for man to make the fictitious story, only provided there is a desirable purpose to be attained by it. Nothing is difficult or unlikely for God to do, if only there is a sufficient motive for doing it. It is entirely a question of reasons and importance, and here we see that the entire purpose of God's great enterprise calls for something that will produce just that feeling in men's hearts,

—calls for something precisely of the character of the events and relations which are narrated here.

This same feature of God's loyal friendship for Abraham is brought out in the two little side incidents of God's appearing to the bondwoman Hagar. First, when she is mistreated by her mistress and runs away, she is met by God's angel and told to go back again to her mistress (Gen. 16 : 7 f.), precisely as a friend of the family would have done if he had run across her, and without any notice at all of the injustice with which she had been treated. Later when she is sent away rather cruelly by Abraham, God's angel again finds her and befriends her (Gen. 21 : 17 ff.), but does it very expressly for Abraham's sake, because her son Ishmael is Abraham's son. It is not the God of Justice, certainly not the teacher of morals and character, that is most in evidence here, but merely the loyal, faithful friend of Abraham.

In the incident of the great trial with regard to offering up his son Isaac (Gen. 22 : 1–13), this is not so evident at first sight, perhaps, but yet that really is the nature of the incident. It is essentially a friend testing the loyalty and trust of His friend, rather than the act of a Moral Governor and divine sovereign. And this fact helps to explain and justify what to the modern conscience has presented several questionable features.

God wishes to test the faith and loyalty of His friend. Not that He has any doubts Himself about it or does not know, but rather He takes this means to make conspicuous to all the world these noble traits which He knew that His friend Abraham had in a

remarkable degree. Though it was doubtless pretty severe while it was going on, yet really there was no greater kindness or honour which He could have showed to His friend than thus to prove conspicuously before the world his noble character.

Familiar Approachableness Rather Than Greatness

The trouble with us in these days is that we have become so obsessed with the idea of bigness that we can appreciate nothing but the bigness of God. It is the biggest battle-ship, the biggest steel company, the biggest international exposition that holds all our attention. It is the infinite bigness of God that makes the greatest appeal to us. It is a new discovery, and we can't get through admiring it. Like the boy with a new toy, who thinks it is about the most important thing in the world, science has discovered the unmeasurable bigness and greatness of God, and we can't bring our minds to appreciate that there are other aspects of His character that may be of just as much, or far more, religious value than this fact of His extreme greatness.

As a philosophical fact this conception of the greatness of God is, of course, of very great importance. But for practical devotional purposes, to us that greatness, beyond certain limits, is not an advantage but the reverse. So much so that God had to veil that greatness by a human body and human nature in Jesus Christ in order that it might be possible to make the approach to us which religion required. For that

greatness tends to obscure in our minds the tenderer, sympathetic qualities which form the basis of religion, and which alone can meet the longings of our hearts.

We are making now that same mistake that the Church in the middle ages made. They allowed their minds to dwell so much upon the exalted majesty of Jesus as the Son of God that even Jesus became exalted entirely beyond the range of human sympathy, and they had to bring in the offices of the Virgin Mary and the Saints to supply that sympathetic friendship which they could no longer conceive of God as affording. We have equally, from another angel, exalted God in our thoughts to such an infinite greatness that the same result has ensued. Only we have not put in any substitute, as they did, but have built up a religion consisting solely of character and social service, that don't really much require any God to make it go.

What we most need to-day is to get back again to the Old Testament with its anthropomorphic God. We need just what these old Abraham stories furnish to put a little blood and life into our religious experience. What our hearts need, just as much as theirs and the people of all time, is this familiar, companionable God depicted here, who met with Abraham as friend with friend, stood by him just as helpfully when he did not deserve it as when he did, who seemed to treat him almost as a bosom companion from whom He had no secrets, and who had human spirit and humour enough to employ a friendly stratagem to make conspicuous to all the world the marvellous faith and loyalty of His friend Abraham.

IV

MOSES

THERE are a very few cases of the supernatural in the times of Abraham's near descendants, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, consisting of visions, dreams and interpretations of dreams. Isaac has two visions in which the promises already made to Abraham are renewed to him (Gen. 26 : 2–5, 24). Jacob has the dream of the ladder up to heaven (Gen. 28 : 12ff.), which Jesus Himself interprets (John 1 : 51) as conveying the same lesson which His own coming proved, namely, that God is accessible to men and sympathetic with them. Also there were the angels and the man wrestling with him on his return from Padanaram with a similar value (Gen. 32 : 1–24 ff.). Joseph's dreams (Gen. 37 : 5–11) were of personal favour and greatness that was to be his, and his interpretation of the dreams in Egypt (Gen. 40 : 9–19 and 41 : 25–36) were part of God's plan to bring that favour to him. All of these were calculated to make them feel that God was interested in them and caring for their personal welfare. All were very appropriate contributions to the great purpose God had in His religious propaganda at that stage.

After this we have record of no more supernatural acts for several long centuries, till the times of Moses.

Reading the Bible one perhaps carelessly gets the impression that the history of the Israelite race is represented there as a continuous succession of these miraculous events. The fact is that the record only speaks of a few, coming at specially significant epochs and hundreds of years apart. This relieves to some extent the feeling of abnormalness.

Of course the occurrence of one single supernatural event is just as great a problem as the occurrence of a hundred, for it equally implies the same kind of a new and different agency, and the agent that could do one might also do a hundred. And yet a kind of event that we never see at all in our own time we perhaps find it easier to be reconciled to if its occurrence is not represented as too frequent when it does occur.

Reason for Miracles at This Time

When we come to the times of Moses, however, we find the largest and most brilliant collection of these miraculous events anywhere recorded in the Old Testament, and second only to those that occur in the life of Christ. Is there a sufficient reason for this? Is there any purpose which God had at this time that would call for this kind of events? and if so is it of such a special nature that it would call for such an unusual number of them?

This was the time of the founding of the nation of Israel. It was the most important epoch in the history of the people from whom all our religious traditions have been received. Still if we interpret the history of Israel merely as the history of a people who had

great insight to appreciate religious truth, and if religion is merely knowledge of God's law and development of character and conduct in accordance with that law, any miracles at all at such a time would seem to be not only unnecessary but a positive hindrance.

According to the theory we are following, however, religion is a matter of fellowship with God, and fellowship is not a matter of discovery or insight but of active deeds and intercourse. It is something which requires God to do something as well as men. Not because God has to teach it or men would not know the way. Even that might be an insufficient plea for the presence of supernatural acts. God has to do part of it or there is no fellowship.

Israel is to be the nation where this religion of reciprocal fellowship is to be specially cultivated. It is natural therefore to expect that in special crises of their history some conspicuous acts of God's supernatural fellowship will be done. This time of Moses is a period which we may consider the most important epoch in all their history, for it is the time of first establishing and organizing them as a nation. It will not be unreasonable therefore to find a very special display of God's supernatural works occurring at that time.

We have just seen that the first great cluster of such events occurred at the time when this specific movement was first being launched,—when God was first separating out the race of people and beginning with them the long course of religious propaganda, in the time of Abraham. Though that movement, of selecting and setting apart this race, was more fundamental,

yet the movement now of erecting them into a nation was a much larger movement, and there were many more people present and concerned, so we find even more of these supernatural acts at this time than in the time of Abraham.

They are also of a slightly different kind, as befits the case, larger and broader in their nature, and including the feature of calamities inflicted on other nations in aid of this nation, and also of chastisement of unruly parts of the nation itself for the greater benefit of the whole. At bottom, however, the acts all have the same nature as those done to Abraham, namely, acts of friendship, even we may say of partiality. They are not the acts of impartial rule and justice, such as we would naturally attribute to the moral ruler of the world, but partial acts of special friendship and favouritism to one certain favoured nation. Indeed they are afterwards emphatically and frequently appealed to as being acts of partiality and favour.

Beginning of the Movement

The beginning of this group of miracles was the call of Moses by God in the burning bush in the wilderness (Ex. 3:2 ff.). This has been interpreted as a very significant sign, indicating that though Israel was in the midst of the fire of affliction they would not be consumed. But far more important than any such mystical meaning is the simple fact itself, that after long centuries of silence in the unseen, God was now again beginning to give visible exhibition of His personal interest and sympathy for His people.

It must indicate that some epoch of importance has arrived. God always has sympathy and personal care for His people, but it is not commonly His plan to show it visibly. He always has perfect sympathy and interest when He is not giving any visible sign as well as when He is, so it is not a proof of new or greater interest when there is some visible sign or miracle on their behalf. It must be a sign that some special epoch or occasion has arisen in which it would be appropriate to make one of the occasional visible manifestations of His interest.

And so we see that this marks the beginning of a great movement by which the Israelites were removed from Egypt, organized into a nation and settled in the land of Canaan, in which they were to play the leading part in the development of religion for many centuries. In some respects this was one of the most important events in history,—that is to say, it was an epoch or crisis in recent evolution.

While the outward appearance of this miracle was such as to suggest mystery and fear, by the fire and the unconsumed bush, yet the actual substance of the interview was such as to confirm our position that when God appears in the supernatural it is never in the character of moral ruler; creator or anything else that belongs to nature, but always in the character of partial, patient friend.

The movement is now going to be national. He is going to deal with nations. He assigns Moses a place and a leading part in the great act of friendship He is going to do for the nation. But it is distinctly as His

own agent. Moses is to be simply God's agent in a great friendship act.

It is an act of *friendship* and not of justice or judgment, and it is so set forth. There is no hint that the Egyptians did not have a perfect right to retain the Israelites as slaves. Israel themselves did the same to the Gibeonites at a later period. It was recognized as a perfectly allowable thing in that age. It is true that complaint is made of great cruelty that the Egyptians had inflicted on them (Ex. 3 : 7, etc.), but that is not referred to as a crime of inhumanity to be punished but simply as a misfortune under which His friends suffered and from which He was going to deliver them. It is altogether a case of a powerful friend seeing His friends in distress and proposing to go and help them.

Towards Moses, too, personally God acts more like a friend than a sovereign. Instead of commanding him He reasons with him to persuade and assure him. Even after Moses had resisted and refused in the most disappointing manner He is still patient and gentle with him, plans for his brother to be a helper to him, and gives him several signs of a supernatural nature both to reassure him and to give him standing before the Egyptian court.

After Moses goes back to Egypt, shows his signs, and his demand for the liberty of his people is followed by the command for still severer bondage, there follow the ten plagues (Ex. 5–12), by which the Egyptians are entirely overawed and the Israelite people are allowed to go out from the country.

It is not necessary to go into the details of either the

signs or the plagues. They all have the same object, to so frighten the Egyptians that they would be willing to let their slaves run away from them, and at the same time to impress those slaves, the people of Israel, with the fact that they had a very powerful friend who was exerting Himself on their behalf.

That is the real character of the whole transaction. It is not judgment on the Egyptians for any crime. It is not punishment. It is not even claimed to be an act of justice. It is simply the arbitrary act of one who was strong enough to do it, taking away the lawful slaves of the Egyptian people and giving them their freedom, because they were His friends and He wished to do them a favour.

It was quite in accord with the universal law of nations at that time for Him to do this,—the law that has been supreme all up the evolution process till very recent times,—the law "that he may take who can." It was no international wrong for Him to free those slaves, as the laws of nations were at that time, but neither was it God interfering to right a great international wrong. It was simply God as a great and powerful friend interfering to help His friends in trouble.

While the sending of these plagues does not figure as an act of punishment on God's part, but merely the arbitrary act of a strong friend doing a favour to his friends, yet there was an element of punishment associated with it. This is referred to by the Apostle Paul when he says that God raised Pharaoh up especially for the purpose of exhibiting His wrath upon him (Rom. 9:17).

But this punishment was quite a side issue, and did not furnish the main purpose of the movement. That main purpose was deliverance of His friends, and not punishment of injustice that had been inflicted on them. Indeed in as far as it was considered to be of the nature of punishment it was not punishment for any wrong done to the Israelites but punishment of his stubbornness in resisting God's orders and plans.

Emphatically it was not punishment for punishment's sake either, but punishment for a warning, to make people feel that they must not interfere when God undertakes to assist His friends. If God intentionally raised Pharaoh up for that punishment we cannot possibly consider that its main purpose was to secure getting a bad man punished. Its teaching value must have been its main meaning. It is the benefit to Israel and others that is the real object, not the punishment to Pharaoh.

Using Natural Law

We may notice in passing a very important point to which allusion has already been made. Most of these plagues were not supernatural at all in form, in the sense that the supernatural is usually defined, namely, as something out of the range of the action of the laws of nature. They were purely natural events, produced entirely by natural causes in the natural way, and were events the exact equivalents of which have very probably occurred at various other times both before and since. Such were the storm, the locusts, the murrain and several of the others,—possibly even all of them.

And yet they were in the truest sense supernatural events, that is to say, they had the same meaning, value and force as all the other events in the Bible that are called supernatural. The whole movement of the history and the esteem of all men classes them in the same class with all those other events.

What gives all of them their special place and meaning is not that they were done with or without the ordinary operations of nature, but that they were acts of God intentionally directed for the benefit of some individual or restricted group. Such these plagues are represented to be. They are acts of God intentionally and personally directed for the help of the Israelites. In this case He used the ordinary operations of nature to produce that specialized help, as in other cases He used some other means. The means is not essential. It is the motive and the object that are essential.

To us there is special importance in the fact that God so used the forces of nature here for that purpose. It tends to reassure us, as it did the people of that time and of all times, that it does not require a violation of the natural order of things for God to bring us some help or good if He wishes to do so. It helps us to feel that even while all things are running along smoothly and unvaryingly in the channels of nature, God can, does and is taking individual care of our best interests, and can, does, and is bringing about events with special reference to our good. It is this species of the supernatural which is especially suited to bring religious comfort and assurance to people of the present day.

Personal Care

What was true of the plagues was also true of what occurred at the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army (Ex. 14:21–31). It was all brought about by natural causes, but yet it is properly called a supernatural event, for it is manifestly exhibited as an event specially planned and produced by God for the sake of this people which He wished to befriend. Also it was not the act of God as moral ruler, or a judicial act, but entirely an act of partiality and favouritism. God does not profess to be punishing the Egyptian army for any wrong they had done to Israel, much less to be rewarding Israel for any merit. On the contrary it was their improper conduct in murmuring and threatening to rebel that was the immediate antecedent of the deliverance. It was not an act of judgment but the patience of a long-suffering friend.

We may group here also a number of incidents that occurred at various times all through the journey to Canaan. There was the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex. 13:21, etc.), the bitter waters healed (Ex. 14:23–26), the manna (Ex. 16:4 ff.), the quails (ver. 13), the water from the rock (Ex. 17:5, 6). Some of these were apparently produced by natural causes and some not, but they all alike must be classed as supernatural, for they are distinctly recorded as specially and intentionally brought about by God for their personal benefit as His friends.

Their object was the same as that of all the other supernatural, namely, to impress upon the people now at this critical time the friendliness, sympathy and ac-

cessibility of God. They were all acts done to care for this people and supply their wants, and mostly to supply wants that all the large body of people felt personally and very acutely, as for instance hunger and thirst in the desert.

Such acts would make just the kind of impression it was most important to make, and would make it very deep and strong. They would make this deep impression not merely on a few leaders but on all the people, who were all the beneficiaries of the help. And it would be remembered and felt by them and by their descendants for many generations to come. Such supernatural acts were therefore very appropriate for the purposes desired, and this was a very appropriate and opportune time for their occurrence.

At Mount Sinai

Most important of all were the events that occurred about Mount Sinai, in connection with the giving of the law (Ex. 19 ff.). Not only does Moses day after day meet and talk with God and receive from Him all kinds of communications, but God reveals Himself personally in a most conspicuous way to all the people.

The whole mountain is covered with a veil of smoke or cloud for days, with God understood to be veiled within the cloud. From time to time come thunder and lightning as tokens of His presence, and at a certain time God speaks from the midst of the cloud with a mighty voice that all the assembled people could hear. Altogether it is by far the most spectacular

piece of the supernatural recorded in the Old Testament, or indeed in the whole Bible.

It must have been a most impressive sight and a momentous occasion. Here was a great company of people, still thrilling with the joy of their recent deliverance from slavery, and looking forward with eager expectancy to a career that was before them in a land which was to be theirs, and all by the favour and the special acts of a great, powerful, unseen God who was befriending them. Now amid scenes made up of the most impressive natural phenomena they actually meet God personally present before them within the mystery of the smoke-veiled mountain. As they look He speaks to them, and they hear a voice proportioned to the greatness and majesty of the rest of the scene. He proclaims Himself their God and friend, and enunciates ten great fundamental rules for their welfare.

What we are interested in here is in seeing whether all this scene was consistent and appropriate, and whether there was a sufficient and appropriate purpose for a manifestation of that kind. Was the occasion sufficient to warrant such a great display? Were the acts themselves appropriate and fitted to advance some purpose that was held by God at that time?

The events recorded were certainly very spectacular, and in magnitude and impressiveness they were greater than occurred at any other time. Just so this was the most momentous time in the whole Old Testament movement, and the one that would warrant the most magnificent display. It was the founding and organizing of the nation,—of the body in which the whole

religious movement was to be carried on. That would naturally be a time for the most conspicuous displays and most impressive manifestations.

In human affairs it is always so. Men always consider some kind of special impressive display appropriate at the founding of any important institution. Not that God feels the same desire for display as men do, for this display was not for God's satisfaction but for men's sake, to impress them. And since human feeling calls for some such display as appropriate at such a time, that was sufficient reason for God granting it.

But more than that, there was great practical use for such a display at this time. The way a project is started out may give the bent to all its future course. If this nation in the very act of their organization were deeply impressed with a peculiarly intimate and friendly relation of God towards them, as well as with His magnificent and enormous power, that might deeply affect all their subsequent history,—as in fact it did.

If at the time of the founding right tendencies were formed and deeply impressed, this would have immensely more influence than an equal effort to produce those right tendencies after wrong tendencies had gained headway. If there was ever to be a time when the strongest effort should be made to make the right impressions on them it was now. If God were ever going to use supernatural events to make an impression on them we would naturally expect that there would be such events and a greater number and more striking display of them at that time than at any other.

Were these events appropriate? What was the pur-

pose God had in view? Were such events as these suited to impress on the people what He chiefly wanted to impress upon them?

He wished to make such an impression upon them as a nation that they would always feel that He was their friend, near them and sympathetically interested in them, as well as able to help them. In fact He wanted to make such an impression upon them that they would feel towards Him very much the same feeling that the other nations felt with regard to their special Tutelar Deities.

There is a suggestive thought there that we will do well to consider. That sort of feeling was a right feeling as far as it went. Felt towards God it is the very essence of religion. It is a natural yearning of the human heart, and we cannot think that the true religion that God shall institute will be less satisfying to the yearnings of the human heart that these other, mistaken religions.

God wanted to impress them once for all with the reality of His presence and friendly relation specifically to them. What more effective way can we conceive than by just such a scene as that which occurred at Mount Sinai? They listen to the actual voice of God speaking to them. It is a voice of sufficient magnitude to impress upon them enormous power and superhuman character. At the same time it is speaking to them personally, not merely speaking something in general for all the world, which they happen to be able to hear. It is distinctly personal and restricted to them. It is addressing them in the attitude of a friend, and is pref-

aced by a reference to His previous special interest in them and favours to them. "I am Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20 : 2).

It is an actual physical meeting with God, just as real and in the same sense as they would meet with any human friend. Unlike Abraham's meetings with God his friend, God does not here appear in the size and form of an ordinary man, but in something greater and more majestic. This was appropriate to the new conditions. It was a nation that was now concerned. The nation now needed to feel that they had a friend great and strong enough to be to them the friend that they needed as a nation in their conflicts and national troubles. The enormous voice of God speaking from the heart of the smoke-veiled mountain would produce that feeling of majestic power and greatness, while the sympathetic, personal note of His speech would still impress them that it was a sympathetic friend that was so enormously great and strong.

Unlike Abraham again, they did not see God in any visible form. The form of a man would not be appropriate for such an enormous voice, and any other form would be out of place. The only reason for ever appearing to men in a physical form was in order to appear familiar and companionable to them, and that could be affected only by a man's form of ordinary size. As that would be inappropriate here no form was shown. All feeling of abnormalness or lack, however, was obviated by having the place of His presence veiled with the thick smoke and cloud.

The whole scene, therefore, is perfectly consistent and appropriate. It teaches the lesson which they as a nation needed then most to learn. It is specially calculated to impress upon them that there was a great God who was their ally and helper, that He was a being exceedingly grand and powerful, yet sympathetic and favourable to them.

Ruler or Friend?

When we come to consider the substance of what God says, both now from Sinai and later to Moses, we might, at first thought, be disposed to consider that He is appearing here as God the great Moral Ruler rather than merely as a friend. His communications consist chiefly of rules and laws.

But we must bear in mind that now He is addressing them in their capacity as a nation, since it is the occasion of the founding of the nation. He is not speaking to them as individuals that may be restricted and restrained by those laws, but as a nation to which laws are the sinews of life. As a nation He is herein giving them the food to sustain their national life, just as at another time He gave them manna to sustain individual physical life. Both acts may be assigned to the same class, as gifts of kindness and friendship.

Or again, we notice that Moses is represented as in daily consultation with God over the affairs of the nation, just like a subordinate in consultation with his chief. He goes out day by day to the appointed place of meeting, there he confers directly with God, receives instructions and is directed by Him, and gradually

elaborates the system of government and religious ritual for the nation. This would seem to mean,—as indeed is often explicitly declared later,—that God claims to be the immediate head and ruler of this newly organized nation. At first thought this would also seem to be a contradiction of our theory that God in the supernatural stands always in the attitude of friend and helper. Here He seems to be standing in the attitude of ruler.

It is true He does appear as ruler here, and He claims that place all through the history of Israel. But we must notice a fundamental difference between *this* relation of ruler and the relation of God as the moral ruler of the world. It is not as the impartial judge and sovereign moral ruler of the whole world that He appears here, but as the specific ruler of this one nation. He appears not as the impartial arbiter of all nations but as the partisan of this one, completely identified with their interests even when they antagonize the equally just interests of other nations. Moreover if we count that the ideal ruler exists for the sake of the nation and not the nation for the sake of the ruler, it is fair to take that value as the value of the relation of God here in His proposed perfect rule of this nation of Israel.

It is not an exception then, but just a higher instance of the same fact of God in the supernatural always appearing in a friendly personal relation, giving some benefit. This was the highest way in which He could come into personal relations with this nation, and the highest kind of friendship and greatest benefit He could give to it as a nation.

Other Incidents

Other supernatural incidents of this travel period, such as the miraculous judgment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Num. 16), and of the priests Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10 : 1–2), grow directly and necessarily out of this relation of God as chief of the nation. They were severe on the individuals concerned, but they were necessary for the welfare of the whole nation, and so are to be classed as benefits, not evils. If laws are to be valued as benefits the execution of those laws must also be rated as benefits.

One little incident, the miraculous healing of persons bitten by serpents through looking at the brazen serpent lifted up on a pole (Num. 21 : 6–9), was used by Jesus (John 3 : 14, 15), as a type of the free gift of Eternal Life that every one that would look to Him should receive. This and all the other wilderness miracles have the one aspect and meaning of God meeting men on a human plane in a friendly attitude bringing personal favours.

There were some little side incidents connected with Baalam and Balak (Num. 22–24) that contain cases of the supernatural. It would emphasize to the people the thoroughness of God's care for them to see Him thus on their behalf interfering in the affairs of other nations. The incidents also seem to imply that, though unrecorded in the Bible, God probably at times made personal revelations and had personal contact with others outside of the people of Israel, though only sporadically and not in the organized manner that He did so in Israel. If there were even occasionally thus such

revelations to other peoples it would make it seem still easier to justify the one long special dealing with this special people.

The first supernatural event in this connection was the appearance to Balaam by dream with reference to his going to Balak (Num. 22 : 9–20). The fact that God first forbade him to go and later allowed him to go because He saw his heart was set on it, is not contrary to what we know God's attitude to men is. It shows God, however, not in His attitude of absolute sovereign ruler, but rather in the attitude of friendly, indulgent over-lord. It is a human relation, not a divine one, and governed by human considerations in a very human way. Though He is sovereign with authority, yet He acts rather by way of persuasion and advice, and in such an attitude as to invite the freedom of fellowship rather than forced obedience.

On the way going to Balak we have the extremely curious incident of the ass speaking to Balaam with a human voice, and an angel appearing (vers. 22–35). This incident,—making an ass speak,—seems so crude and inconsistent with the dignity of the ruler of the universe that we are inclined to set it aside as certainly merely a folk tale or myth.

But we should remember that this was before the days of automobiles and wireless telegraph, and the ass was a much more honoured member of the household than now. Anyway it is not as ruler of the universe that God deals with man in these supernatural acts, but as friend, and expressly to impress His friendliness and approachableness. So the more homely the act

the more appropriate, as it would have the more value for impressing the relation of companionable friend.

Two or three other miracles in the early part of Joshua's career, such as the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 3 : 14–17), the taking of Jericho (Josh. 6 : 15–21), the vision of the armed man (Josh. 5 : 13–15), and the like, naturally belong in this group. They are still connected with the organizing and establishing of the nation. Like all the others their import is to impress the friendly help and accessibility of God. Jehovah as an armed champion was the real leader of the great enterprise that was to get them a land to dwell in. A miraculous entrance into the land and a miraculous taking of the first city in it and other subsequent miraculous help, were suggestive of what He intended to do for them all through the enterprise,—namely, to open up all barriers and subdue everything before them.

The Fundamental Question

Such is the form and such the meaning of this brilliant cluster of supernatural events which accompanied the organization of this nation which God proposed to use in such a special way. They are all consistent and appropriate, provided only God's purpose was such as we have maintained that it was,—provided religion is primarily a personal social relation between men and God,—and provided God's purpose in religion and in this enterprise with the people of Israel was not merely to elevate the moral character of the world, and get a set of high and useful laws accepted and adopted, but

to establish a friendly, trustful social relation between people and Himself.

If religion is fellowship with God, and God had singled out this people of Israel for the purpose of cultivating a high and close state of fellowship with them, it would be strange indeed if in such a special time as this, the most critical in all their history, He did not give them some special manifestation of His friendliness and personal interest. It would be strange if He did not do something so evident that they would unquestionably recognize it and vividly feel it, and something of such a nature that it would tend to produce in them a feeling of loyalty, trust and fellowship all through their future. It would be strange if God did not give some special manifestations for that purpose, and it would be hard to imagine any manifestations better adapted to serve that purpose than just these that are recorded here in this Moses narrative.

There is nothing strange or hard to believe in any of this, *provided only we recognize the supernatural as one of the accepted factors of history.* There is really the crucial question. Such things do not occur apparently now, and with our scientific and matter-of-fact minds it is so hard to vividly imagine their occurring that accounts of them seem unreal to us.

But the question of the supernatural is not a small, indifferent matter. The whole fabric of our devotional religion depends on it. The whole movement of conversion, faith and inner Christian experience implies special personal acts and relations of God. All answer to prayer is necessarily of the nature of the super-

natural. It is so even if the answer comes entirely through natural means, or if the whole affair is entirely in the mental and unseen sphere. If God gives any benefit really because it is asked for and as a personal favour to the asker, it is just as supernatural as the majestic voice from Sinai. If He does not, then prayer is a sham and a self-deception. It cannot have value even as good spiritual calisthenics, for what healthy spiritual benefit can come from mockery and deception?

The trouble with most of us is that we do believe in the supernatural ourselves, but many men whose opinions we greatly respect do not believe it possible, and so we would like to reduce the volume of the conspicuously supernatural in our religion as much as possible, so as to avoid rousing their prejudices.

But cowardice never wins battles. If the supernatural is a fact it not only demands our belief, but it is a valuable factor in the fabric of knowledge and life. We ought to rejoice in it and give it our enthusiastic allegiance, just as much as men of science do with strange and revolutionary scientific facts.

V

ELIJAH

FROM this time of the organization of the nation, on through some five long centuries, again we have only a few sporadic and inconspicuous cases of the supernatural occurring. Aside from some things that would more properly be considered under the class of prophecy, the list is very short, and they all had their appropriate meaning and use at the time.

There was the angel appearing to Gideon (Judg. 6 : 11 ff.), and the homely little test of the dew on the fleece (vers. 36–40) at the time of a great defection and a great deliverance. There was the angel appearing to announce the birth of Samson, who did such remarkable deeds against the Philistine oppressors (Judg. 13 : 3 ff.). In the time of Eli, when the Ark, the symbol of Jehovah's presence, was taken away out of the country by the Philistines, there were some supernatural signs and plagues on the Philistines (1 Sam. 5), and some signs when the Ark was again sent back to its own country (1 Sam. 6), to which we may add the sign of judgment upon Uzzah (2 Sam. 6 : 7), when it was to be brought up to the capital of the country in the time of David.

There were God's call to Samuel and some other special signs (1 Sam. 3, etc.), during the period when a

critical change was to be made, and the government become that of a kingdom. At the time when the temple was dedicated there was a sign of acceptance in a cloud filling the building (1 Kings 8 : 10, 11). At the time of Jeroboam's setting up false worship he was denounced by a prophet, and as a sign his hand was withered and then restored (1 Kings 13 : 4–6).

All these supernatural signs were quite homely and unobtrusive, and not much of a list to be scattered over more than five hundred years. If God was personally promoting this enterprise of training Israel, and if the essential thing was to win them to a confirmed state of fellowship and trust in Himself as their great friend, the wonder is not that there were so many, but that in the long stretch of five centuries there were so few of these supernatural acts to make vivid to them His friendly presence.

All at Special Times

They all came at times of crisis or importance in their history. The first, under Gideon, came at a time when the nomadic Midianite hordes had invaded the country in such force as to threaten to destroy them out of the land, as they themselves in a somewhat similar way had supplanted the former inhabitants of the country. The second, in connection with Samson, came at the time when the strong Philistine nation was beginning to spread its power over them, and threatening to destroy or absorb them. In both these cases the report spreading through the country that their God had granted a supernatural appearance to some one

would have great influence to encourage the people against the foes that threatened both their nation and their religion, and it would kindle anew in many fickle hearts the feeling of trust and loyalty to their great patron Jehovah.

The third was when these same Philistines had advanced their power by a great victory, and had carried away the Ark, the sacred emblem of Jehovah's presence and friendship. The supernatural features exhibited here were quite significant. In the first place the presence of the Ark brought only disaster and suffering to the Philistines, seeming to indicate that the God which it represented was the partisan of the Israelites still. The remarkable circumstances of the return seemed to indicate unequivocally that it was Israel to which He gave His favours. The judgment of those who handled it with rude curiosity was suited to impress the sacredness of the personality that was there represented. In the judgment that fell on Uzzah when the Ark was removed later to Jerusalem, the same lesson was taught, of the sacredness and majesty of the Jehovah whose token it was. This, though severe, was really a friendly advice that it was very necessary and valuable for the nation to receive.

During the period when a kingdom was being first established, and the nature of the government changed to the unified rule of a visible sovereign, in the time of Samuel, it was very appropriate that this great change should not take place without some supernatural reminders of the presence and continued friendly and helpful relations of Jehovah. Of course it was appro-

priate that there should be some visible sign of God's presence when the national worship was being permanently established in adequate form in the capital. And it was quite appropriate that the religious defection or heresy of Jeroboam, which was ultimately to alienate a large part of the nation from God entirely, should not be allowed to pass without some supernatural protest.

The Great Crisis

We now come to another, and the last brilliant cluster of miracles in the Old Testament. We find that it came at a time of great crisis for the cause, only second in its importance to the time of Moses when the nation was founded with such a brilliant display. It was the time of Elijah and Elisha.

The nation was inundated with an overwhelming invasion of a rival religion, that seemed likely to blot out the Jehovah religion entirely. Not only the northern tribes, but the more loyal southern nation of Judah as well, were ruled by sovereigns zealous for the Baal worship, and so thoroughly had the great mass of the people been carried over to the new allegiance that the prophet Elijah honestly believed that he was almost the only one left in all the land really loyal to Jehovah (cf. 1 Kings 19 : 10). It must have been a very critical time for the cause indeed. No wonder then if this was one of the times God chose for a numerous and brilliant display of these acts that revealed His friendly presence.

The supernatural events of this group may be roughly divided into two classes. Those in the first class were

severe and conspicuous, those in the second class mild, beneficent and more private. Those in the first class concerned the nation or groups of people, those in the second chiefly individuals. Those in the first class may be considered as addressed to the nation, to win it back to organized allegiance to its protector, God. Those in the second class may be considered as intended to invite individuals into the relation of trust and friendship. This division, however, is not very strictly maintained, as a number of the occurrences would not correspond to it.

Conspicuous in the first class are the famine that Elijah foretold (1 Kings 17:1 ff.), the fiery test on Carmel (1 Kings 18:30 ff.), and his calling down fire from heaven to slay the soldiers sent against him (2 Kings 1:9–12). It has been suggested that as Baal was considered to be especially the lord of fire and of the sun, God's using these as the medium of chastising signs was sarcastically directed at the Baal worship. At any rate they were adapted to impress God's great power and make the people feel how desirable it was to be under the friendship and protection of such a strong God.

Elijah himself is represented as being carried up by a chariot of fire to heaven (2 Kings 2:11), but at Horeb, although the enormous force of the earthquake, storm and fire went before as signs, it was not in these but in the gentle, quiet voice of friendly fellowship that God made His real approach to Elijah (1 Kings 19:12).

Three others of the supernatural events were of

national significance. In one the army of Israel was saved from perishing of thirst by water furnished in a mysterious way in ditches dug in the valley, and a great victory gained over the Moabites (2 Kings 3 : 13 ff.). In another, after revealing to his king the stratagems of the Syrian king, Elisha strikes the Syrian soldiers sent to capture him with blindness and leads them to his own king at Samaria (2 Kings 6 : 8–23). In the third, by making them hear a mysterious noise God frightened the Syrian army besieging Samaria and caused them to flee and raise the siege (2 Kings 6 : 24 ff.).

All these incidents represent Jehovah as the patron and partisan of the Israelite nation, for of course there was no question of right or justice concerned either way according to the accepted law of nations at that time. In the first case there was first a protest made that after their shabby treatment of their protector Jehovah they ought not to have the face to expect Him to help them now, and yet for all that He does help them.

A rather peculiar incident is the case of the crowd of boys that was attacked by bears after ridiculing the prophet Elisha near Bethel (1 Kings 2 : 23, 24). Though our sympathies are touched, perhaps, by the youth of the offenders, yet the meaning of the occurrence was practically the same as of the judgment on Uzzah (2 Sam. 6 : 2), on the Bethshemesh men (1 Sam. 6 : 19), or on Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10 : 2). There must have been a large crowd of the young men altogether if as many as forty-two received injuries.

They must have represented a very bitter and determined element opposed to Jehovah, as otherwise, after all his spectacular experiences, a crowd of boys would surely have hailed Elisha as a famous hero instead of ridiculing him, for that is boy nature.

Really there was nothing outside of nature in what the bears did, and we are not told that Elisha even predicted any such thing, yet probably we would be right in including this among the supernatural events. At least as such it would not be inappropriate.

Of the quieter, individual events several concern the prophet himself. There was the feeding of Elijah by ravens at the brook (1 Kings 17 : 6), the angel at the juniper tree in the wilderness (1 Kings 19 : 5–8), the crossing of the Jordan (2 Kings 2 : 8), and the recrossing again by Elisha after the ascension of Elijah (ver. 14). All these were simple little acts of personal care, excellently adapted to impress the friendly, congenial attitude of God towards those that seek to be in that relation with Him.

The remainder of these events were mostly with humble individuals. There was the meal and oil multiplied to sustain the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17 : 14–16), her son restored to life (vers. 17–24), the water supply of the prophets in Jericho made good (2 Kings 2 : 19–22), the prophet's widow aided by multiplying her cruse of oil (2 Kings 4 : 1–7), the son of Elisha's Shunemite hostess restored to life (vers. 8–37), the ax recovered (2 Kings 6 : 4–7), the poisoning of the prophets healed (2 Kings 4 : 38–41), and the incident of Naaman (2 Kings 5 : 1 ff.).

Restricted to a Special Group

It will be noticed that with the exception of the last all of these were in aid of some member of the order of the prophets or of some one who had conspicuously favoured the prophet himself. This is so marked that it must be given value as a feature of the case. Remember that it was a time of very wide defection. These "Sons of the prophets," whatever their other characteristics, were certainly a body of people loyally attached to Jehovah in the midst of the defection. These therefore specially represent the "Friends" to whom God might be expected to show Himself friendly. That He does single these out for the almost exclusive objects of His favours marks these events as not general benevolence but acts of personal fellowship and friendship with distinct meaning.

The healing of Naaman was a conspicuous event, and it was not done for any member or friend of the prophetic order. In this respect it is an exception among the private miracles. But it is an exception that proves the rule or impresses the same lesson that all the others do.

It is not done to one of the prophetic order who were faithful to Jehovah, but neither is it done to one of the other people of Israel who were so largely unloyal. It is done to some one outside of Israel entirely. It looks as if God wanted to show that He was still accessible in a friendly spirit when sought by others besides those in the prophetic order, but purposely refused to do the friendly act to those who had specifically violated the laws of friendship by their disloyalty,

and went outside entirely to find some one to do the act to.

Notice that Jesus uses this incident and that of the widow of Sarepta to point this very lesson (Luke 4 : 25–27), illustrating the fact that Jesus could not do the acts of blessing and friendship He wished to do to His old neighbours who ought to have been His best friends but had to go outside to other strange communities to do them.

After the death of Elisha there is the account of a dead man raised to life when his body touched the bones of the dead prophet (2 Kings 13 : 21). Such an incident as that would be calculated to bring very vividly again before the mind and feelings of the people the departed prophet and all that his life and teaching stood for. It is that aspect which gives it its appropriateness.

Later Instances

From this time on, during the following seven long centuries we have only about half a dozen records of supernatural incidents. There were two or three in the time of Hezekiah,—his healing (2 Kings 20 : 1–7), the sign on the sun-dial (vers. 8, 9), and his deliverance from the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19 : 35, 36). King Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for sacrilege (2 Chron. 26 : 16–19). There were two or three in the Babylonian captivity,—Daniel's interpretation of dreams (Dan. 2 : 25 ff.), his deliverance in the lion's den (Dan. 6 : 16–23), the deliverance of the three men in the fire (Dan. 3 : 21–27), and the handwriting on the wall (Dan. 5).

The second and third of these well typify the condition of the faithful Jews in the midst of enemies, and would be well calculated to assure and comfort their hearts with the feeling that their mighty friend could and would still protect them. They were very appropriate to the situation. The interpretation of dreams would more appropriately be considered in connection with prophecy. The handwriting on the wall spoke doom to the kingdom of Babylon, but that doom was closely connected with their opposition to the people of Jehovah and was a means to their rescue later.

The time of Hezekiah was a time of great revival and return to God after serious defection. The supernatural acts were all favours to King Hezekiah who was the prime mover in this return to God. There were two quiet private favours, the healing of his disease and the sun-dial sign, and one conspicuous public favour, the relief by the destruction of the Assyrian army.

The occasion was certainly important enough to warrant some display of special friendliness by God who was so much interested in the return of the people to friendly fellowship. Hezekiah was the representative man to whom it was appropriate that the favours should be shown. And the acts done were quite appropriate also.

Perhaps they were not exactly what we would have done to exhibit approval under the circumstances, especially the first two,—the healing and the sun-dial sign. We would have had something more flashy and recondite. But that was the kind God wanted. For He

considered the homely, sympathetic, human quality of His kindness the most important thing of all. That was the thing best adapted to arouse in us the kind of feelings He wished us to have towards Him.

Thus from beginning to end we see that these special incidents in the Bible to which we give the name Miracles have all one character and one motive. They are all merely acts of God done personally to individuals or to one single nation. The motive of them all is just to show kindness and friendship to some one whom God wished to befriend. In every case they came at an appropriate time when it was important that such a display of God's personal friendship should be seen. And in every case the nature of the act was quite appropriate for the purpose God had in view. It is all just God the great friend showing practical friendship to persons He had pledged Himself to befriend, and the intention of it all is to invite and draw us also to enter into that same relation of friendship with Him.

VI

PROPHECY

THE next form of the supernatural to consider is Prophecy. In considering this the main problem is not how future events could be foretold or if it is possible or reasonable that they should be. Foretelling future events is merely an incidental detail in prophecy. In our colloquial usage the term prophecy has come to be confined chiefly to that one matter of foretelling future events, but the prophecy of the Bible is something far broader than that. Foretelling the future does occur more or less in the prophecies, but it is chiefly for practical effect in warning and encouragement, and merely incidental in most cases.

The prophet was a man who professed to speak something which he had received directly from God. He claimed that God had put into his mind certain thoughts which he merely proclaimed to the people. The essential part of prophecy then was God communicating thoughts to men. If that really occurred then prophecy was a fact.

It is easy to juggle with words and obscure a definition. We may say that all truth is really God's thoughts, that all discovery is merely receiving God's thoughts or thinking God's thoughts after Him.

Therefore any high, advanced thinking might be called receiving God's thoughts, and so prophecy. But this is merely an evasion. In practice we recognize certain definite ways of getting new thoughts. We may get new thoughts by perceiving and studying things. We may get new thoughts by putting our previous thoughts together and reasoning about them. But we may also get new thoughts without either of these processes if some other person has the thoughts or knowledge, and communicates it to us by speaking, writing or some other way.

This last is what we mean here with regard to God. He had a thought that He wished some man to have and actively communicated that thought to him in the same sense that another man would communicate his thoughts to him. The question is,—has God done that? Did He do it as He is represented to do it in the Bible?

Inspiration

While that is what we must consider prophecy to be if we follow the traditional conception, there is another somewhat similar process that we ought to consider in this same connection. We may conceive that God wishes a man to have a certain thought or conviction. He does not communicate it to him directly but He intentionally and specifically brings such influence to bear upon his mind that by the processes of his own investigation and thinking he gets that thought or conviction.

The influences that God thus brought to bear on the man's mind might be greater or less, they might be

supernatural or all natural in form. This would not be particularly significant. The only important condition is that God specifically wishes a given man to get a certain thought and He takes definite personal measures of some kind which are instrumental in his getting that thought. He would not have gotten it without this special something that God did, and God did that something specifically for the purpose of causing that man to get that thought.

This differs from prophecy in the point that God does not communicate any thought as a thought to the man, and the man gets no thought that he has not worked out by his own mind processes. But it resembles prophecy in the point that God wishes the man to have the given thought and takes definite special steps to that end so that the man gets a thought that he would not have gotten if God had not done what He did to make him get it.

This latter process is what is very commonly conceived as the meaning of the term Inspiration. For the most part what is said below as to the meaning and purpose of prophecy would apply equally to this also.

Many, perhaps, would wish to resolve all prophecy into a matter of this nature and define it in this way. They seem to imagine that a process of this kind would be a less objectionable kind of supernatural than that which is assumed in the ordinary conception of prophecy as an actual communication of thoughts by God. It is possible to conceive that this kind of helpful stimulating and directive influence by God may be going

on now in the common experience of Christians, unperceived but none the less real. It would therefore by its frequency and present occurrence lay claim to being a part of natural law and not supernatural at all.

But it would be altogether a logical blunder to count this kind of a process less supernatural or easier to justify than the other actual communication of thoughts consciously recognized to be received from without and from God. If this unconscious manipulating, stimulating and guiding of men's minds is a specific personal act of God it is most distinctly a supernatural act, whether it is recognized as such or not. And if it is done solely to get some truth discovered that men would not otherwise have discovered, it is a supernatural act that would be difficult to justify or account for without impeaching God's competency in the evolution process.

Mental facts are just as much a part of nature and just as much controlled by the evolution process and natural law as physical facts are. Any intrusion or special manipulating of them is just as supernatural as if it were visible material things that were being manipulated. If for instance God brought any influence to bear personally and intentionally upon the mind of the Persian king to lead him to permit the Israelites to go back from Babylon it would be in every respect just as supernatural as if He by great spectacular plagues and signs delivered them from the king of Egypt. If God personally contributed any mental stimulus or brought any influence intentionally to bear on the

mind of Isaiah to widen his vision and deepen his insight so that he could read more correctly the signs of the times and give valuable advice to the people, it would not be in any respect less supernatural than it would be for God to make a great voice sound from the cloud on Mount Sinai speaking the Ten Commandments.

The Supernatural Must be Evident in Order to be Justifiable

It is a naive kind of ignorance which counts that if a supernatural act can be so sly and inconspicuous as to slip through without being noticed we must let it go unchallenged. Really a supernatural act that was unrecognized as such or unconsciously received would be harder to account for and justify than one that was open and evident. *It is precisely through its being recognized as a supernatural act that it finds its justification by becoming a contribution to fellowship.* We have seen that it is impossible to justify any supernatural act done primarily to improve men's condition or teach some undiscovered truth or for any other merely utilitarian purpose since it would impeach God's competence as Creator. The only ground on which we can justify and account for any supernatural act is as an act of fellowship done by God, and in order to have value as fellowship of course it must be recognized as a special personal act of God, that is as supernatural.

A definite communication received and recognized as being from God, just such as it is traditionally con-

sidered the prophets experienced, would be a most natural and appropriate act of fellowship and so perfectly justifiable whether any moral, social or political benefit came from it or not. But an unconscious and unrecognized heightening and directing of some man's thought powers to lead him to discover truths just because they were of great economic importance would be an interposition that it would be very difficult to justify.

Such heightening and directing of men's thought processes as is assumed in inspiration could indeed be justified if it was done so as to be evident and was popularly recognized and believed to be really the work of God. In that case it would have the same value as prophecy and thereby be justifiable. Historically just that kind of help from God has been believed by Christians to have been granted in connection with the books of the Bible, and that help so granted has made a strong impression on men's minds as an act of fellowship. So assuming that such help was really so given all conditions are fulfilled to constitute it real fellowship and thus fully justify it. But if it had not been so believed and recognized as a work of God there would be no grounds on which we could well justify it. For it is precisely its effect on men's minds that constitutes it fellowship and so justifiable.

The traditional view, therefore, of both prophecy and inspiration really meets the requirements of science and evolution philosophy far better than any of the modern attempts that have been made to improve or replace it.

Didactic Writings

It is under this latter head, or Inspiration, that we may consider all the poetical and didactic portions of the Old Testament, such as the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes or Job, to be entitled to be called supernatural. In as far as God was concerned directly or indirectly in assisting in their production and is frankly recognized to be so, they are a contribution to the one great enterprise of fellowship. All that is said about the miracles or prophecy would apply equally to them. As far as they teach, warn or inspire men to better living it is an act of kindness, and an act of kindness that God was concerned in, and so a contribution of friendship and fellowship by Him to us.

It is a significant circumstance and unquestionably a fact that in the use Christians in past generations have made of these compositions the thought of their origin being from God has been a paramount factor in the influence which the writings have had upon them. It is that which has really carried to them far more benefit and comfort than they would have received from the bare intrinsic substance of the things written. When they were reading them they felt that they were reading God's word, and *that touch with God* has always been the chief value of the Bible to the Christian heart.

As proof of this we may notice that many of these same precepts and truths can be found in the writings of Confucius, Gautama, Epictetus and other religious teachers and sages, but we have nothing like the same feeling in reading them there that we have in reading

them in their setting in the Bible with all the atmosphere of divine nearness surrounding them there. Historically it has always been the fellowship touch with God believed to be in them which has really constituted the greater part of their power and value.

Credibility of Prophecy

We need hardly stop to go into the question of the possibility of such communication as is implied in prophecy. One of the startling discoveries of recent years is the possibility of direct thought transference from mind to mind independent of physical means. Naturally a discovery so revolutionary finds many men still sceptical, as is true also of many other important scientific facts. But when scores of men in the very highest rank of scientists declare unequivocally their belief that the reception of thoughts or mental influence by one mind directly from another mind is a demonstrated fact we are at least in good scientific company when we presume that a man's mind may receive thoughts equally directly from the mind of God.

We may notice also that in the investigations of this phenomenon of direct thought transference it is accepted as a rule that the most favourable condition to receive such influence is that condition of mind that is called by such names as "Secondary," "Subconscious" or the like, and which is seen in hypnotism and in the spontaneous states of trance, catalepsy vision and the like. The state of dreaming also is closely allied to these. And just these states of trance, vision or dream were the states in which most commonly these prophets

professed that they received their communications from God.

From the standpoint of their possibility or plausibility we need have no embarrassment therefore about the prophecies. If we believe in a living, thinking God, He not only could give these communications to men, but science, under some such term as Telepathy or Thought-transference, is just now insisting upon the existence of parallel or equivalent phenomena occurring now in the field of natural life, occurring moreover under conditions very similar to those in which these ancient prophecies were received.

But really the serious objection against the occurrence of prophecy is not that God could not but that He would not do such things. Especially if the communications were for practical effect in teaching and training the people there are most weighty objections against supposing that God should do a supernatural act for such a purpose.

The whole wide book of nature is God's teaching. The whole course of evolution and all the movement of history is a course of training and discipline. These are the means that God designed and provided expressly for the purpose of teaching and training, and wonderfully effective means they have proved to be. It is inconceivable that after providing means so very efficient to produce these results He should think it necessary right in the midst of the process to break in by special interpositions of supernatural teaching and training to secure the same object.

We have already considered this same question at

some length with reference to the miracles. We saw that they could not be justified if given merely to benefit the world or to certify and attest some teaching. The miracles all found their justification in their intrinsic character as acts of kindness done by God to individuals for the sake of fellowship. It is there also that we must look for the justification of prophecy. It is all to be interpreted as fellowship bestowed by God, and therein it finds its justification and reasonableness.

But it may be objected that the very substance of the prophecy is teaching. That is its intrinsic character. It would seem here as though God was certainly breaking in by a special interposition to do what He had made full provision for in the machinery of nature.

This would be so if these prophecies stood alone with this as their only meaning. There would be some reason for this charge if for instance they had been given like the Mormon Bible professed to be given, miraculously written on plates of gold and left for some one to find and proclaim to the world at large. Or again to some extent there would be reason for the charge if these prophecies had not been confined to Israel but had been given sporadically and independently to individuals scattered through all the nations.

Place in God's Plan

That very question is often asked. Why do we not equally have the same kind of prophecies now? Why were these prophecies confined to the one people Israel? If God really does such things why would

He not do them equally for all nations and for people of the present time as much as for that one ancient nation long ago?

Right there is the essential fact and the key to the whole problem. These prophecies are not isolated, independent facts but are parts and necessary parts of a great movement and system. The specialness of Israel was an essential feature of the movement. It is entirely in that they were given to this special people Israel that these prophecies find their justification.

God did not interpose to supernaturally give teaching or training for the world that the world could not have gotten otherwise. The real character and genesis of the prophecies is not that but something else. As an act of fellowship God had assumed and was carrying forward a specialized relation of friendship and communion with this particular nation Israel. In pursuance of that fellowship He did various appropriate things.

One thing always appropriate for fellowship is conversation, communicating ideas from one to the other. *We carry on conversation just for the social touch and fellowship.* That is what all the prophecies are. Of course it does not make it any less essentially an act of fellowship that the ideas communicated are profitable, as teaching, training or in some other way. All God's conversations we may be sure will consist of matter that is useful and instructive, and yet it is none the less truly conversation for fellowship's sake. That is the fundamental purpose for which it was given. It was not to reveal to men new truths but to make them feel His presence with them and yearning care for them.

Conversation Begun at Sinai

At the very beginning of His fellowship with them as a nation God spoke to them at Sinai with an audible voice that they could near (Deut. 4 : 12), just as they would hear the voice of a friend in conversation, though of course with the majesty and volume befitting the circumstances.

That the words spoken at Sinai were the Ten Commandments is not the important thing, for there was no new revelation in any of those commandments. There was nothing in them, at least in the ethical part, but what had been recognized and enforced as law in all that region for hundreds of years. What was significant was that God was personally speaking to them. Even though the words He spoke were well known and recognized principles, we often open conversation with a friend by some obvious, commonplace remark. God was so to speak, opening conversation with them as an act of fellowship. That was the real epoch-making significance of Sinai.

Was then that conversation stopped as soon as begun? Through all the succeeding hundreds of years in which He still wished them to feel Him in personal fellowship with them was there no further continuation of that conversation?

There are many and obvious reasons why a frequent repetition of the stupendous voice of Sinai would be neither appropriate nor helpful to them (Deut. 5 : 23–28 ; 18 : 16). But it would be both appropriate and helpful if they could have cause to feel that that conversation was still being carried on and God was

still continuously in friendly conversation and social touch with them, provided it could be done in some way that would not interfere with the natural normalness of their daily lives.

Can we think of a way that would be more natural and appropriate and less obtrusive than the way represented here, namely, by God in a way that we now know is a natural way by which thoughts can be communicated directly from one mind to another, communicating thoughts to certain individuals of their number who in turn passed them on to all the rest. In other words by this order of prophets and institution of prophecy, for there seems to have been a succession of these prophets almost all through their history.

In this way on God's part the conversation begun on Sinai was continued, and all down their history the friendly fellowship of conversation was kept up. In its right setting we see thus that prophecy was not only a justifiable thing, but it was a natural and necessary thing if human fellowship with God is a reality, and if God in the Biblical movement was exhibiting a great movement of fellowship carried on in the way that human fellowship is ordinarily carried on.

Continuous Order of Prophets

We commonly think of the prophets as the sixteen men who wrote the prophetic books of the Bible with a few others, such as Elijah, Elisha, Nathan and Samuel. This is as great a mistake as it would be to think of Christian preachers as consisting of

only a few great men, such as Fenelon, Spurgeon, Moody and the like, whose published sermons have become classics.

The prophets were an order of religious men somewhat analogous to the clergy of our time. They flourished at least for many centuries. References to them in the Bible are frequent either by the term Prophets or "Sons of the Prophets." They certainly were in existence in Samuel's time (1 Sam. 19 : 20). The passage in Deuteronomy 18 : 15–18 along with others may be interpreted to mean that the order of prophets was instituted and continued right from the time of the founding of the nation, and they were in a sense the successors of Moses himself. We must notice also that it is expressly indicated in that passage that the meaning of these prophets was the same as the meaning of the voice from Sinai. That voice from Sinai was too awesome to be the regular method of communication. The people plead for something simpler and this order of prophets was given in its stead (Ex. 20 : 19 ; Deut. 5 : 23 ff.).

When considering the Old Testament miracles the question naturally suggested itself, if the meaning of this supernatural régime was fellowship granted by God to men why was it not more continuous and frequent ? Three or four groups of a dozen or so of these miracles or fellowship acts, coming at intervals of two or three hundred years apart, would not seem to indicate a very close relation of fellowship on God's part (cf. page 210).

If we are to consider that the whole Israelite move-

ment was a movement to impress God's sympathetic friendliness, some species of continuous personal intercourse and fellowship by God with them would seem to be called for. Just that is furnished by this order of prophets, and furnished in the most appropriate and helpful way.

As expressed in the passage in Deuteronomy, the visible appearance and audible voice of God on Sinai was too awful and overpowering and neutralized the desired effect of social friendliness. But by this method the voice came from a man "of their brethren" just like themselves, though the communications were from God. This man received the communications from God in a quiet, unobtrusive way, a way which we now find to be quite in line with natural processes, and which at that time was considered appropriate for a communication from God.

All down through the history of Israel we find this succession of prophets,—of men who were the medium through which God spoke to the people and kept up His fellowship of conversation with them. That they were quite numerous seems to be indicated by the fact that even in the dark times of apostasy under Ahab the one hundred of them that Obadiah saved (1 Kings 18 : 13) was only a remnant from the great number that Jezebel killed. A little later Elijah visits communities of them in Bethel and Jericho (2 Kings 2 : 3–5), and the company in Jericho was so large that fifty men from them went to seek for the body of the translated Elijah. Even in Samuel's time they were so numerous and well known that when Saul acted in

a peculiar manner the people immediately concluded that he had become one of them (1 Sam. 19 : 20–24).

Divine Revelation of Teaching

But was the office of these prophets, as we have claimed, to afford social touch and fellowship from God to men? Was not their office really that of teachers, to reveal useful knowledge and instruction from God to men, and thus an unnecessary irruption into the evolution process?

As has been already noted, social conversation, even if its main purpose is entirely social friendliness and fellowship, must be about something. If from a good and wise man it will likely be something useful. Certainly conversations or communications from God will have as subject matter something profitable even though the purpose that inspired it is entirely the wish to show social friendliness. Indeed the helpfulness of the conversation will just so much more make it an appropriate act of friendly fellowship.

That it cannot reasonably be considered essentially an enterprise of teaching is proved by the fact that at least as regards merely ethical matters of man's conduct to man there is very little if any new teaching given. The things denounced by the prophets as sin are such things as murder, adultery, drunkenness, theft, oppression, cruelty, falsehood and the like. All of these had been recognized as evils by all the nations for ages. The prophets merely warn and denounce the people for engaging in these known sins. In all their denunciations of sin they refer to the evils denounced as al-

ready known to be sin, rarely if ever setting forth any new ethical principle or precept which they command to be obeyed.

What is new, or at least fresh, is their vivid representation of God's attitude towards all these things, and their bringing to bear all the weight of God's personality against them. This is the thing that is relied on to produce the reforming, elevating effect upon the people, and this is something that lies distinctly within the sphere of fellowship.

Personal Atmosphere

Almost wherever we take up the prophecies for examination we are impressed with the fact that the dominant note is not revelation of doctrine but personal appeal. There is much reference to ethical and theological truth indeed, to sins against men and sins against God, but it is always referred to not as revelation of new principles and new laws, but as reference to things they knew to be wrong and the mere mention of which ought to touch them with shame. The whole force of the appeal depends on the fact that they will spontaneously recognize these things as wrong, and that they knew or ought to have known that they were doing wrong when they did them.

But the one most significant thing is the intensely personal tone that dominates it all. It is the impassioned pleading of a friend with a wayward friend. It is the protest of slighted friendship. It is the appeal of a lover for a love that he has a right to expect and that his heart yearns for. He has lavished his friend-

ship, favour and care, and Israel does not reciprocate with answering love and loyalty but chooses the fellowship of other friends and lovers.

Such in substance is the note that is sounded again and again by almost every one of the prophets, and which may be counted the characteristic theme of the whole movement. And a most remarkable feature is the way that frequently the most severe arraignment of disloyalty and ingratitude will end up with a declaration of entire forgiveness and restoration of favour, and this too apparently without anything in the circumstances to warrant or call for it (cf. Ezek. 16 : 63 ff.; Hos. 2 : 14 ff., etc.).

It is all indeed a revelation in the truest sense. Not a revelation of doctrines and ethical principles, but a revelation of the heart of God. It is just such a revelation as ought to have the greatest drawing power to bring them into trusting fellowship with Him. And manifestly that is the one great purpose for which it is given.

It is a great picture of God. And if we will broaden our minds to look on the picture as a whole without distracting attention to criticism of the details we must see that it is the same picture that is presented by the four Gospels of the New Testament. It is a great friend pained by the sins and ruin of His loved friends, pleading with them to reform and return to Him, and ever breathing the promise of forgiveness and restored favour and peace. Nor is the feature of suffering atonement entirely lacking, for in many passages we can see in God's deep grief and pain over the sins of

His people a suggestive parallel of Gethsemane if not even of Calvary itself.

Severe Prophecies

When we consider the text of many of the prophecies, however, a rather severe difficulty seems to arise. We have claimed that all the supernatural was a personal friendly fellowship movement by God to win men into a state of trusting fellowship with Him. But a large part of the prophecies consists of denunciations and threats of punishment. How can this be made to agree with the conception that these prophecies and all the supernatural are acts of friendship, have their motive in a relation of personal friendship and are intended to win men to friendship and trust? Are they not rather the acts of a moral governor, a supernatural interposition for the sake of, if not punishment, at least discipline and government?

In answer to this we must first remind ourselves that friendship is not always a matter of smooth words and flattery. That only is true friendship which can use severe words and painful messages when they are necessary and helpful. True friendship must adhere to the truth. He would be the truest friend to Israel who would tell them plainly of the sins that prevailed among the people and the punishments those sins would surely bring.

It is true indeed that it is the same person who is speaking in prophecy who is the one that will inflict the punishment. But even that need give us no difficulty, for we must remember that while that is true

yet the inflicting the punishment is an entirely separate act from the act of giving warning about it, and that is all that the *supernatural* prophecy is. That punishment when He does inflict it will not be part of His supernatural activity. It will all be a part of natural law as we have seen. It will be the work of God as moral governor, and God does not need to resign His place as moral governor in order that He may offer to act as a friend. The only supernatural part in the transaction is the warning and appeal, and that is not the work of a judge or governor but of a personal friend.

We must remember that Jesus is declared to be the one who will judge the world and condemn the wicked, yet no one questions that His attitude towards all men is always that of a friend, and He wept over Jerusalem to think of the punishment that was coming on the people for their sins. It is the same heart that appears in all the warnings of the prophecies. All through even the severest denunciations there is evident an undertone of sorrow and pain, as though God Himself were suffering over His people both for their sins and for the punishments those sins would bring upon them.

Not all of prophecy, however, is of this severe character by any means. A large part of the prophecies consist of comfort, assurances of triumph and bright pictures of the future for God's people. Moreover the extant texts of the prophecies must constitute an exceedingly small proportion of the vast amount of prophetic utterance by the large body of prophets all through so many centuries. Those on record are largely

prophecies called out by some pressing crisis in the history, and so more likely to be of this severe, denunciatory nature than the great mass of prophecies given in more normal, peaceful times.

We may safely claim, then, that prophecy as well as miracles is all to be included in that one great régime of friendly fellowship by God. It is all appropriate to this which we have considered the main purpose of the Bible. It is all a service of friendship and fellowship. The tone of it all is a continuous appeal by God to the people for loyalty and trust. It is a very necessary part of that régime as it furnishes just that which such a special relation of fellowship as God proposed positively demanded and without which it could hardly be said to exist, namely, a continuous intercourse of friendly conversation by God with the people.

VII

NATIONAL HISTORY

THE third division of the supernatural in our classification comprises the historical parts and all the remainder of the Old Testament. It has been usual to consider this to be supernatural in the sense that all the writers were inspired or specially helped and guided by God in its composition. We may perhaps go beyond this and find a supernatural quality in the very substance of the history itself.

We have defined the supernatural to be activity of God personally directed to definite individuals, in distinction from His general activity in nature, which is directed to the whole universe impartially. In this history much of the activity of God is represented to be of this class, personally and intentionally directed to certain specific individuals or to a particular nation. Indeed it is all a story of special treatment by God of the nation of Israel or of individuals in it. That is the very essence of the plot of the whole narrative.

In addition to this we find that all the events are represented as observed from God's view-point. The events themselves may have been all just ordinary events such as occurred in all the other nations and are occurring to men and nations now, but while in ordinary history we see only the human side and human

elements, what men did, suffered or desired, in this case we see more, for we see God having an active part in these same events. We see God behind and above, directing and using them all. Especially we see His plan and intention with regard to them. This possibly would not make it supernatural within the definition that we are using here, but it is a feature that has a similar value in that it gives us a close and familiar view of God, and thus contributes to the feeling of personal acquaintance and fellowship with Him.

It is these features of the Book that are the most important. Indeed in as far as the Bible is to be considered a book of religious teaching it is these elements that give it its value. It has been another way of viewing and estimating the Book which has led to all the trouble and embarrassment. On the one hand, men have considered the Bible heroes as intended to be religious models and standards,—with very embarrassing results. On the other hand many have considered the whole to be but the history of a people of specially keen religious instincts gradually struggling upward into the light, practically precluding any supernatural elements in it at all, and of course abrogating any religious authority or normative value.

Bible Characters All Normal Men

In making our study of the Old Testament history then we will practically disregard any special moral excellence of any of the characters. We will not consider the people of Israel on any different plane morally from any of the other nations of the time. We

shall not attach any significance specially even to any higher theological conceptions they may have attained. The people portrayed, or some of them, may have been distinctly superior in many respects to the average men of the age, and their theological outlook may have come to be very much purer and higher, but that is not the lesson of the Book.

The real lesson intended to be conveyed is to portray how God acts and has acted. The men and their characters and beliefs are merely the material which He uses in showing His activity and His character. The history is a biography of God. The picture is a picture of God. It is because a person can only show social characteristics by having other social beings with whom he interacts that all these human persons are introduced as the groundwork of this picture of God.

That the picture may be of the greatest value the persons to whom God affords the friendly social touch should be of all classes and all moral grades, the best of them with many faults and all of them together just fairly averaging up to the general standards of their age, as we average up to the standards of our age.

This then is the nature of the history which we shall take up for study. It is a book of the biography of God, intended to portray to us how He acts towards all classes and conditions of men and what is His attitude towards them, and also what is the attitude He permits and invites from them towards Himself.

In making this study it will not be amiss to remember that it is the same God who "taught the lion to hunt his prey," and made the great sea monsters to

tear and devour one another. It is an infinite being whom we are studying who does His work with reference to the whole universe and all time. It will clarify our vision much to thus view Him from the standpoint of the evolutionist and view the parts in the perspective of the whole. We must abandon the idea that "God only loves good little boys." He uses and is in intimate contact with all both bad and good. Moreover He strictly adheres to His original creative purpose to leave all things to develop naturally and live their lives on the level to which they have attained, and He uses them all just on that level. This is an important principle whose neglect has led to many of the difficulties in reconciling acts attributed to God.

There is a style of interpretation of the Bible in which God's activities are supposed to be like a stream of pure water flowing through the turbid, corrupt stream of man's history, and the people that God uses for any important enterprise are for that reason assumed to be necessarily superior if not faultless men. This is not at all the theory of interpretation which we are following here.

Lessons from God's Dealings with Nations

We may take up first the history as it refers to nations and second as it refers to individuals. We will bear in mind that what is important is not the fortunes of these nations or their reactions with each other but only God's attitude towards them and His treatment of them. From this view-point what is the lesson which the Book brings?

Our first thought perhaps would be that the lesson will be God's beneficent rule over the nations, and His efforts to lead them up to higher and purer national life. The natural tendencies of men and nations are towards things that are evil and corrupt. Rulers are ambitious and selfish and society left to itself soon becomes cruel and bad. God constantly sits above the movements and councils of nations, correcting and leading them into the ways that make for right and progress. The Bible in showing us God's activity and influence behind human events will show us that though unknown to us God is constantly restraining the natural tendencies of men and nations and infusing higher, purer elements into the corrupt stream of human activity.

A little examination, however, will show that this opinion is not quite correct. While the Bible assumes that God does have perfect power over all the nations and all their activities, and while we know that in His great world plan which we call Nature He is providing the most efficient apparatus for the restraining of evil and steady advance of progress, yet the history in the Bible does not for the most part represent Him as ever interfering by any supernatural or special control for that purpose. For a special reason which we have considered already He does do many acts of helpfulness and guidance to one nation, Israel, but that was not done primarily for the improvement of the world for improvement's sake but was wholly an exercise of friendly fellowship by God because it was His plan to engage in such fellowship for an independent reason.

As regards all the other nations of the world it represents Him as leaving them entirely to follow their own inclinations and desires unhindered,—subject of course to the judgments and retributions which natural law visits on all wrong-doing.

Even in the case of this one nation, Israel, it is not an effective, coercing control but chiefly counsel, encouragements, warnings and moral suasion. It is the care of a wise friend rather than the manipulation of the creator God. As a matter of fact the nation did develop in most respects according to its own natural tendencies and was not noticeably different from the other nations of the time and region, as we know from other contemporary history, and also from a careful reading of the Bible history itself.

The Bible teaching as to the nations in general seems to be that He leaves them to develop freely according to their natural tendencies. He leaves the evolution process untrammelled to work out the destiny of nations as well as individuals. That evolution system is His work, and it is admirably efficient in securing the good results He wishes. Having established at creation such a great efficient system He does not interfere with it to do by other means the work it was designed to do.

Such is the picture the Bible gives us of God in His attitude towards all the nations of the world. Nations as well as individuals are free to follow the path of their own desires, though God's natural laws are just as free and are certain to visit on them the results of their acts. Nature and evolution, since they are God's work, do have very efficient facilities for lessening evil

and bettering rational conditions, but this does not come by arbitrary outside control and special supernatural interference from God. The Bible gives us no slothful assurance that some divinity will shape up the ends which we rough hew, either as nations or as individuals.

Lessons from God's Dealings with Israel

But this is not the message the Bible was given to convey to us. It is a true and valid negative inference, but the real lesson which the national history contained in the Bible was intended to convey to us is something positive, and it is all bound up in the history of God's dealings with this one nation, Israel, as indeed that constitutes the real body of the history, and the references to other nations are merely auxiliary and incidental.

The lesson we are expected to learn from God's treatment of the nation of Israel is not a political lesson, it is not a lesson in government nor even in national morality. It is not primarily a lesson to nations at all in their national capacity. It is a religious lesson, as all the other lessons of the Book are, and it is a lesson directed to us as individuals, just as all the other lessons of religion are. For religion, as we now know, is not a matter of masses and of organization, but primarily a private matter between the soul of each individual and God.

The reason why the action is with a nation rather than with an individual is in order to magnify it and write it large so it will be conspicuous and impressive. But

the intention is to influence private individual hearts by the picture of God thus portrayed. And we may note also that that is the way it has always been used by the Church. The experiences of "God's chosen people" and God's attitude towards them have constantly been used by our fathers as in some form or other typical of private Christian life now.

What then is the history portrayed? Briefly stated the Bible represents that God chose the nation of Israel to give to them special treatment and favour. He rescued them from slavery, built them up into a nation, gave them laws, and gave them His own care as overlord and ruler. He assisted them to conquer a land to dwell in, and enabled them to maintain their integrity there as a nation for many hundred years.

During all this time He continued in intimate social contact with them, giving them advice and warning, occasionally allowing them to fall natural victims to the aggressiveness of powerful neighbours when they broke the bond of fellowship by apostasy, but delivering them by special means when they came back again into the fellowship of loyalty and trust. This very briefly is the essence of the history. What is its meaning and its value practically to us?

In the first place, the primary teaching of it all is not some great political lesson for the nations and their rulers, but a personal, private and purely religious teaching to us as individuals. The meaning of it all is to so exhibit God in an attitude of intimate personal kindness as to thereby invite and draw us and all men into a relation of trust, loyalty and confiding fellowship

with Him. That is the lesson which it is all designed to convey to us.

The essence of the whole movement is not moral government but partiality and personal help. It is not a lesson in government, not even in ethical training, but personal friendship. According to the Bible representation God chose this nation for this special treatment, not for any special moral worthiness in them either present or prospective. It was entirely a matter of personal friendship between Him and their great ancestor Abraham that led to His promising such special treatment in the first place. All through the history He carried out that promise distinctly in the character of a friend showing favouritism and not as the impartial moral ruler of the world treating all nations alike.

The conditions which determined the continuance of that special helpful relation towards them were not primarily ethical but personal. It was a personal loyalty towards God as a person which was the one condition continually insisted upon. It was always breaking that bond of fellowship by apostasy that was the cause of the withdrawal of God's protection with the consequent disasters that came upon them.

Peculiar Attitude Towards Idolatry

It is a significant fact that the one fault most often and most heavily charged against them was precisely this fault of breaking the bond of fellowship by apostasy in following other gods. Again and again there are accounts of their being allowed to fall under op-

pression on account of their sins, but the sin specified is not ethical wrong, cruelty and crime but worshipping idols and thus offending against the bond of loyalty that should unite them to God.

There was plenty of crime and evil in the land, and in the prophets we do find frequent charges and warnings on account of it. But that is a different matter. The prophecies, as we have seen, have the nature of conversations by God with them in which He would speak to them of anything that was profitable to them, including their relations to Him as moral governor of the world. But in the movement of the history, in as far as it gives the account of God's special dealings to show His personal attitude towards men, whenever a punishment is recorded as coming upon them it is always for a breach of this social fellowship bond, never for ethical wickedness. And the reason was because that was the one essential object of all this movement. Their moral conduct was a matter for God in His character as moral governor, that is in the evolution process, and the whole matter is in the same category as creation and natural law. But here in His attitude of friend, which is the whole theme of the Bible history, the one thing which was an offense to be resented was disloyalty to that friendship, and that is the one thing for which punishment is portrayed as coming in the historical movement.

On the other hand it is a very curious and remarkable fact, and one that has seemed hard to account for, that while idolatry among the people of Israel was so constantly denounced and severely punished yet the

other nations which practiced it exclusively were neither denounced nor punished on account of it. There are occasional representations in the prophets of punishments denounced against these other nations, but it is either for moral sins and crime or else, more often, for the mere fact of hostility and unkindness to Israel.

While the worshipping of idols in these other nations is sometimes held up to ridicule as a lesson (cf. Isa. 44 : 9–11), it is never made the subject of severe denunciations as it so constantly is in Israel. Indeed the earlier literature seems in some cases almost to treat that worship of other gods as quite normal and legitimate in other nations (cf. Judg. 11 : 24). Some have even claimed that the early Bible teaching is not really monotheistic but represents Jehovah merely as the national divinity of the Israelites, recognizing the existence of the other gods of the other nations.

But all this will become quite reasonable when we fully recognize what was the object of these denunciations and of all the Bible discipline. It was not primarily to teach impressively to the world the unity of God and the badness of idolatry. It was not primarily to teach anything to the world. It was all an immediate practical matter with a distinct concrete purpose, namely, to win this one specific people into a relation of loyal friendship and personal attachment to God.

Not teaching truths but cementing a concrete bond of fellowship between them and Him was the thing desired, and idolatry was precisely the formal breaking of that bond on their part. That is why idolatry in

them was so severely treated. The one offense that friendship cannot condone is to repudiate the bond of friendship itself. That is just what idolatry among the people of Israel did.

Among other nations it had no such implication. In the other nations their idolatry was simply looking up with what little darkened knowledge they had, and trying to offer some homage to some superior being that they felt was over them. God Himself was in fact the one and only superior being that was over them, and He need not necessarily resent the ignorance and mistakes of their honest but misguided efforts (cf. Acts 17 : 29, 30). But idolatry in Israel was quite a different thing just because there was clear knowledge and because there was that special personal bond of fellowship between them and Jehovah, a bond which all God's dealings with them were given for the purpose of strengthening, and which idolatry served to entirely break and repudiate.

Israel's Friend Rather Than the Moral Ruler of the World

In this history we must keep clearly in mind the distinction between God as moral ruler of the world and God as over-lord and "Shepherd of Israel." The two relations are quite distinct and essentially different. As moral ruler of the world God must be perfectly impartial, treating all nations with equal favour. But here He is represented as extremely partial, as always treating the Israelites with special favour and giving them advantages and benefits that He did not give to

any other nation, even giving them at the expense of the other nations. He is represented as the special patron of Israel, championing their interests when they conflicted with the interests of other nations even though the moral rights of both were equal. He fully identified Himself with them as against all other nations. All He required in return was what friendship always demands, namely, that they should reciprocate and maintain a similar loyalty to Him.

As pointed out elsewhere, there was no moral reason why the Egyptians should not have continued to hold possession of their serfs, just as any other nation, and the Israelites themselves later, were allowed to do. It was merely that God said, "They are my people and I will deliver them." It was quite in accordance with the ethics and international law of the era for a nation to migrate, seize a land to dwell in and drive out the former inhabitants, provided only they were able. God, because He wished to favour this people of Israel as His own people, made them able and helped them to conquer the land. In the ordinary history of national life it would have been quite impossible that they in that most critical location, the continual battle-ground between Egypt and Assyria, should have long continued without being blotted out as a nation or merged with some other peoples in new and still new national units. But God, because He had identified Himself with them and chose to do so, kept them intact a separate and unmixed nation for a thousand years. God plainly did not act in any of these instances as moral ruler of the world at all, but as the friendly champion of this one

small nation, identifying Himself with all their interests, even in antagonism to the interests of other equally worthy nations.

Not that He at all abrogated His office of moral governor, or that He minimized the value of moral laws and virtue. On the contrary He exalted them, and in His capacity as over-lord and counsellor did very much to establish respect for law and lead the people up to better lives. But the national movements and the favours bestowed were not based on these considerations but on the one fact that God had identified Himself with the interests of this nation and meant to see that they were safe and successful as long as they reciprocated the friendship.

The lesson to us of the national history then is not a lesson directed primarily to our national life, either to its politics or ethics, or even to its relations to God. It is rather a private lesson to us personally as individuals. Its lesson is precisely the same as the lesson of God's dealings with individuals, only magnified to make it more conspicuous. It is just the same as the one lesson of all the Bible, and entirely a religious lesson. It is simply a great picture of God identifying Himself with specific men in sympathetic friendship and fellowship. It is simply a great movement to inspire in us a reciprocal feeling of trust, friendship and fellowship with God.

VIII

GOD AND INDIVIDUALS

WHEN we pass to the history as it deals with individuals we are coming to something that seems to touch us more closely. We can see more easily how it has bearing on our own lives. We can see there more evidently what attitude God may be expected to have towards us as individuals, and how we may feel towards Him.

As we take up this topic perhaps our first thought would be that the message is a message, if not of fear, at least of sternness and awe. The Old Testament represents God as a holy being with an intense hatred of sin. The movement is full of punishments of sin. The object is to arouse in us an appropriate fear of God's judgments and a zeal to live righteously before Him. It is a common estimate that the New Testament teaches God's love but the Old Testament was intended to teach His justice, righteousness and punishment of sin.

If by sin we mean crime and wrong between man and man that estimate is not entirely correct. How many instances are there in the Old Testament where a man received supernatural punishment from God on account of moral sins? Punishments there were indeed, but as in the case of the nation, the cause of the punishment was almost always something that im-

pinged upon the personal relation of loyalty towards God. In other words it was offense against the bond of friendship itself that caused the punishments. Moreover in the great majority of cases there was no *supernatural* infliction of punishment at all, but merely when the person broke the bond of friendship God withdrew the protection of that friendship and allowed him to fall under some natural evil impending over him.

There are some cases that at first seem to be an exception to this. Eli's sons were morally wicked, and on that account God predicted their violent death (1 Sam. 2 : 27–36). But even in doing so He was at pains to declare that it was not merely the immorality as such that brought the punishment, but because as priests they brought contempt upon the service of God and thus offended against the personal relation of God to the people.

Again in the case of Ahab, after he had murdered Naboth and seized his vineyard the prophet Elijah comes to him and denounces his violent death and the destruction of his house (1 Kings 21 : 17–29). But from the words of the denunciation, as well as from the fact that substantially the same denunciation had been made before, it is evident that the murder was rather the occasion than the real cause of the denunciation. And when he acknowledged God and repented God lightened the punishment. Doubtless his repentance was chiefly terror at the threatened punishment. Yet it was a real acknowledgment of God and was so accepted.

But more than that, in both cases the punishment was not a supernatural punishment of God but was merely a natural calamity that came upon them. All that it is represented that God did supernaturally was to warn them of it by a prophet and point out that it was really a punishment for their sins.

God does denounce immorality and crime all through the Bible, and warn men of the punishment that will come on them for it. But that is quite a different thing from punishing a man supernaturally. Such warning is really a kindness. Punishment of moral wrong is a part of natural law. It is merely a fact, and it is kindness to warn us of a fact. It is merely a fact that gravitation draws, fire burns and poison kills. That penalty follows the infraction of law either physical, psychical or moral is merely a fact. It is an arrangement that the Creator established from the beginning as part of the great evolution system. It is kindness in God to remind us of that fact, and even to use most urgent means to impress it upon us, as He does so often in the Bible.

In His great enterprise of fellowship God in talking to men must talk about something important. He might have talked to us about the composition of the stars, or taught us how to manufacture radium and construct aeroplanes. But in doing so He would have deprived us of the great pleasure and discipline of discovering those things ourselves. Instead His talk is chiefly on the plane of moral principles which we already know, though He adds the whole weight of His personality and of the bond of friendship between us

to try to get us to feel their truth and benefit by it,—certainly a most appropriate form of conversation between a kind creator and His developing and independent-minded children.

Nature of the Supernatural Punishments

In almost all the cases where God inflicted what might be called a supernatural punishment the offense was something personal to Himself, such as breaking some administrative or ceremonial rule. Nadab and Abihu were killed for breaking the ceremonial rules (Lev. 10 : 1–2). Korah and his companions were killed for defying the administrative rules (Num. 16 : 25–35). We may include the man killed for violating the newly promulgated Sabbath rule (Num. 15 : 32–36), for the punishment was specifically ordered by God. Uzzah was killed for breaking a ceremonial rule (1 Chron. 13 : 9, 10). Jeroboam's hand was withered for a presumptuous wrong act of worship (1 Kings 13 : 1–6). The fifty soldiers were killed for despising God's representative (2 Kings 1 : 9–12). Uzziah was stricken with leprosy for infringing the ceremonial regulations (2 Chron. 26 : 16–19). Even the leprosy inflicted upon Gehazi (2 Kings 5 : 27) was evidently not merely because he told a lie but because he thereby tended to tarnish the sacred office of his master as prophet of God.

Unquestionably there must have been frequent cases of exaggerated crimes, of violence, cruelty and injustice all through the history that might have been held up as examples by supernatural punishment, if God had wished to do so. The fact that He does not do so, and

that there is all this long list of cases where He inflicted supernatural calamity for offenses personal to Himself must have some significance.

If God's object in all the movement recorded in the Bible was by giving friendship to men to draw them into a relation of friendship to Himself, then this meaning is quite apparent. It is quite natural for friendship to resent specially any affront to the person or anything that despises and breaks the bond of friendship. It may patiently tolerate all other kinds of evil, but that is fatal.

We may notice also that when He does inflict these supernatural calamities for breach of fellowship it is always done in a way and in a setting such as to make it as conspicuous as possible, quite in contrast with the miracles of help and mercy, which are often most quiet and inconspicuous. The meal was multiplied and the son raised in the obscure home of a widow in Sarepta (1 Kings 17 : 14–25). The oil was multiplied for a prophet's widow (2 Kings 4 : 1–7). There was a resurrection at the prophet's grave (2 Kings 13 : 21). The chariots of fire were seen only by Elisha (2 Kings 2 : 11). Help was given under the juniper tree in the desert (1 Kings 19 : 5–8). These and other acts of like kind were all done in private, and intended to impress God's sympathy with the humblest and accessibility to the private individual.

But Uzzah is struck down in the great royal procession (1 Chron. 13 : 9–10). Jeroboam's hand is withered at a great national ceremony (1 Kings 13 : 1–6). King Uzziah is stricken with leprosy in the temple at

a great religious ceremony (2 Chron. 26 : 16–19). Both Korah and his companions and the priests Nadab and Abihu were smitten under circumstances of the greatest possible publicity (Lev. 10 and Num. 16). It all looks as though God were trying to accomplish the greatest amount of salutary warning with the smallest possible expense of suffering.

But not all of God's special dealings with individuals, by any means, were of this severe character. By far the greater number of incidents represent Him in an attitude of kindness and favour. Even in cases where punishment seemed urgently called for He is more often portrayed as patient and lenient and seeking to delay or remit the punishments entirely. Moreover if God regarded the personal bond of covenanted fellowship between us and Himself as so precious that the only punishments He did personally inflict either on individuals or on the nation were for acts that despised or broke that bond, that should be to us a ground rather of hope than of fear, for jealousy is considered to be a sign of especial love.

Men of Low Social Level

When we turn then to the other side to study the acts of favour and kindness we find them bestowed upon all classes and grades of people.

One of the significant features of the Old Testament is the way it represents God in familiar comradeship with all sorts and conditions of men, and as using them, even some of the most unlikely of them, in some of His most important enterprises. What we might call "The

fellowship of service" is the highest kind of honour that He could offer to an active, earnest man, and it is remarkable on what low classes of people He bestowed that great honour.

This is something that it is very hard to justify on the theory that God in the Bible is represented as moral ruler, rewarding men for their virtue or bringing into prominence those that are to be models for the world. But it is all clear and plain when we recognize that the Bible was not given to be a handbook of ethics but to picture God forth as the friend of men of all classes. In the Old Testament as well as in the New, He came "not to call the righteous but sinners" and to be the friend of those that need Him most.

Take the character of Jephtha (Judg. 11:1–12:7), one of the judges that God used for a great work. He was an illegitimate son, and stung by the obloquy it brought upon him he went away off to the frontier regions and became a bandit, much such a character as "Jesse James" or "Francisco Villa," perhaps. He was rough and harsh by nature, and even after he had risen to favour he killed his only daughter on account of a foolish, rash vow that he had thoughtlessly made.

Is that the kind of man the Bible would have us believe God approves? Are we to take that as a character we are encouraged to imitate? It is hard to see how we can avoid some such implication if the Bible is intended chiefly as an ethical guide and to furnish us examples for imitation. There is not one word given in the record to express disapproval of any feature of his character or acts. He is used by God in a most

important service, and is raised thereby to a position of the highest honour in the state.

Or take for another example Samson (Judg. 13–16), a great, hulking giant, sensual and dull of wit, whose forte was to jest and feast and slaughter men. And yet he stands in the lime-light of God's service, as prominent as any prophet or saint, his birth announced by an angel and his name engraved among the great deliverers of Israel.

Are we to suppose that this teaches God's special approval of that kind of character in men? Is he to be taken as a model, and are we to think that by acting as he did we shall be specially pleasing to God? What useful ethical or theological lesson can we learn from such a character and such a history?

It is hard to see how we can justify, not to say receive profit from, the Bible accounts of such men in God's service on the view that the Bible is primarily intended to teach us ethics and depict God as the moral ruler of the world, or indeed on any other view than the one we have assumed here, that it is intended chiefly to teach us that God receives and fraternizes with any one of any character that is willing to fraternize with Him. It is the same attitude as that notable statement of the New Testament: "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them" (Luke 15 : 2). He is meeting men as friend and not at all as judge or moral ruler. Very imperfect men need friends just as much as perfect ones do,—if there be any such. And the contact of a good and noble friend will be as beneficial to them as it would be to the better man.

It is just God's relation to such characters as these that teaches one of the most important lessons for us. It is a lesson the Church has largely forgotten, or has failed yet to learn. Perhaps it is our recent neglect of the Old Testament as a religious guide that is the cause why this lesson has not been taken to heart in this great sociological age.

For there are large numbers of men of corresponding character among us to-day. They swear. They get drunk. They lead coarse, uncouth lives,—chiefly perhaps because they were born and brought up in that kind of an environment. Christians consider them outside the pale of all church association. If Jesus were to come among us again, and we were to see Him spending days and nights in the company of such men and sending them upon important missions, we would be almost as much astonished and scandalized as the Jewish Pharisees were. These Old Testament stories show us that such men may be just as near to the compassion and the friendship of God as some of us whose characters are of a slightly lighter shade of gray.

With all their coarseness and low ethical standards they were at least responsive to God's advances and loyal. God can do something with that kind of a man. The more he needs it the more ready God is to give him friendship and use him in something good. These Old Testament stories do not teach us that such men are to be our ethical models, but they do teach us that they are our brothers, and that God does not shun them as we do.

Salvation indeed will not mean as much to a man of

that low grade as it will to a man of a higher, finer nature. He will only get what his low, impoverished nature is able to receive from the fellowship of God, and a man of higher, finer nature will get immeasurably more out of that same fellowship. But he can have it just as well as the more highly developed man can, for God is just as willing to give it to him, or to any one who will receive it and respond to it.

Harsh and Cruel Men

Another class of men whose conduct conflicts with our modern standards somewhat is such men as Joshua, Jehu, Saul and the like. They were warriors, ruthless and cruel often. As their actions do not square with the Christian precept to "Love your enemies" and "Do good to all men," it is questioned how those actions could have been actions directed and approved by God.

As for Joshua we must remember that he was part of a great natural movement which God was using to work a favour to this nation Israel. At that time it was as normal for a tribe or nation that needed territory to seize it where they could and drive out the former holders, as it was for the Americans to take the western prairies away from the buffalo and deer. Whether it was ethically right or not is a question we need not raise at all, for God does not even now wait till all the plans and details of their enterprises are perfect and pure before He takes any part in the direction of men's affairs. He takes men as they are,—and He takes wolves as they are,—and He uses the normal acts of

them both to work out wise purposes both in nature and in what we call Grace.

Joshua being such a man as he was, and engaged in an enterprise in which according to the standards of international law of that day it was perfectly normal that he should be engaged, God stood by him as friend and helper, just as He stood by Cromwell, Washington, Dewey or Togo, in great cruel undertakings that yet wrought out great good results to men.

Very much the same was true also in the case of Jehu (2 Kings 9–10). Many of his actions were cruel and treacherous. But they were all quite normal and in accord with the accepted standards of his day. Again it is not relevant to ask whether they were ethically right. He was such a man and did such things as were to be expected of a man in his age, and being so, God, when He was so inclined, saw nothing to hinder His standing by him as friend and using him.

In both these cases, also in the cases of Jephtha and Samson, we must note that they were loyal and faithful to God. Whatever were their other offenses they did not offend against the bond of friendship and fellowship. In all this Bible movement that is the one fundamental and essential matter. Not that morals and character are not extremely important, but simply that they are not the primary theme and object of the Bible any more than political economy is the primary theme of an algebra for instance. The one fundamental purpose of all the Bible movement is to win men into the state of loyal friendship and fellowship with God. That therefore is the one condition that must deter-

mine God's attitude towards any man and His use of him.

And so we see in the case of Saul (1 Sam. 9 : 31) the same proposition illustrated from the reverse side. Saul was in many respects an estimable young man when God chose him. His faults were not especially on the side of aggression and cruelty. Indeed in one case his course was less cruel than the punitive purpose of God called for (1 Sam. 15). But his one fault was precisely offense against the loyalty which the fellowship bond towards his over-lord Jehovah called for. For that offense he was rejected, and God withdrew His friendship and alliance from him. He also declared that David whom He would put in his place was "A man after my heart who shall do all my will" (Acts 13 : 22 ; 1 Sam. 13 : 14).

Thus from both sides we have illustration of the fact that the motive of the Bible history is not ethical but personal and social. It is the purpose of all the movement to try to get men to reciprocate the relation of pledged friendship which God offers. Those that do so are the ones that God uses and can use. It is offense against that relation that is the one cardinal fault that is fatal. That is the one lesson that is intended to be impressed by these stories of Joshua, Jehu, Saul, Ehud, Shamgar, Jephtha, Samson and others, whose characters and actions lack much of measuring up to the level of the ethical standards of our day.

Along with this is the other lesson that no man is so rough and coarse as to be beyond the pale of God's sympathy and even of His companionship and use.

He gives that sympathy and companionship most gladly to those that need it most. The God of the Old Testament no less than the Christ of the New is really "The Sinner's Friend."

God's Companionship with Good Men

We will find this same principle of Bible interpretation to be equally valid with reference to God's relations with other men in the history whose lives were on a higher plane, and whose characters and conduct were nearer to our modern ideals. There is quite a long list of such men, of varying goodness and of varying prominence in the history. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and a large number of greater and lesser men both in public and private life.

It has been considered easier to make the records of these men profitable on the basis of ethical teaching and example. All of them had some admirable points worthy of imitation, and it is easy to pass over their faults with the mere remark that all men are fallible. Yet even the lives of such men as these become much more profitable to us when viewed merely as the background of God's activities in friendliness and fellowship. Even with such men the vivid view of God's friendly social attitude towards them is far more useful to us than any benefit we can derive from the mere goodness to which they themselves attained.

In saying this we are not discovering something new but merely expressing what the Christian consciousness has always felt in contact with these stories, but has

perhaps not always clearly formulated and asserted. Abraham is called "The Father of the faithful" and his faith has considerable value in making up our theological propositions. But to us personally in our religious lives there is far more comfort and inspiration, and far more practical benefit that comes from viewing the beautiful relation of familiar, personal friendship which is depicted as existing between God and him.

The story of Joseph, the temptation he resisted and the unjust suffering he patiently endured (Gen. 39 ff.), may seem a moral lesson adapted to bring us great benefit. But as a matter of fact how much help or inspiration do we feel for instance in reading "The Story of the Two Brothers," a singularly parallel experience related in ancient Egyptian legends, only without the hovering presence of God which infuses all this account and gives it its moving power.

It is God choosing, training and using Moses in a great work which is the picture that chains our imagination and influences us. It is God like a genial father calling the little boy Samuel to His side and talking to him (1 Sam. 3 : 1–14), and continuing the same familiar friendly attitude towards him all through his eventful life, which is the picture that influences us, rather than anything in the incidents and character of that long life.

It is God and David,—God's delight in the humble, manly development of the young man, God protecting and leading him, God opening the way before him and giving him success and power, likewise God chastening him sorely when he fell into sin, and God receiving

him back chastened and repentant into His favour again, God his ally, companion and confidential friend, inspiring to noble thoughts and deeds as well as comforting in times of disaster and sorrow,—this is the picture that is engraved deep in our imaginations rather than merely David the boy hero, just king and mighty conqueror.

With the prophets, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and the rest, God bulks as the principal factor in the incidents recorded, and the prophets are merely His instruments and mouthpieces. With the kings, such as Hezekiah, Josiah, Asa and the others, the narrative for the most part only aims to give their history in its relation to God, how God prospered them when they were faithful, and when they grew disloyal or slack in their allegiance allowed disaster to have its unhindered way upon them. Much the same is true also of all the other minor characters. Their history is given chiefly with reference to some act of mercy, kindness or guidance that God gave to them, and it is God's part in the case that is always the most important feature, together with their personal obedience and loyalty to God.

The case of Solomon is an interesting one. In the beginning there was a very beautiful relation like that of father and filial son between God and the new king. God raised him to great power and gave him wonderful wisdom, and Solomon built the magnificent temple to his God. But in his later years this loyal fealty became clouded (2 Kings 11). Other deities were allowed to have some of the honour that should have been given to God alone. As the direct result of this, we are told,

the latter days of the king were troubled and harassed, and after his death more than half the kingdom was swept away from his house entirely.

We may note that the record makes the sole cause of these disasters to Solomon's house disloyalty and breaking the bond of fealty to Jehovah, though from the after complaints of the people to Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:4), there seems to have been a good deal of oppression of the people by him and other sins that might have been made the reason for the disaster if the book had been written with an ethical purpose. And yet the record cites only the defection from Jehovah as the cause of it all.

In the case of the good kings Asa and Joash almost the same thing is recorded. Disasters came in the latter part of their reigns, and it is all attributed to their defection from Jehovah (2 Chron. 16:7–12; 24:15–25). Some ethical evils are mentioned in both cases, but they are treated as minor matters compared with this one fact of breaking the personal bond with Jehovah.

Attitude Towards Bad Men

We will find that the same principle holds good when we turn to the other side, to the history of individuals of bad character. Even where calamities or punishments are recorded they are never merely for morally bad conduct, and never merely for punishment's sake. They are always for some personal offense against God's personal friendly bond with Israel, and wholly given as a means for strengthening that bond.

The case of Pharaoh may be considered typical. The New Testament makes the remarkable statement that God raised up Pharaoh expressly for the sake of visiting that punishment upon him (Rom. 9:17). Of course then it could not have been punishment for punishment's sake, and it could not have been moral sin that God led him into that he might be punished. It was merely that God so arranged and led that Pharaoh should come into violent opposition to the personal plans of favour He was carrying out for His friends Israel, and the woeful consequences which that must inevitably entail was a valuable object lesson that would stimulate the loyalty of His people Israel and lead them to closer friendly trust.

More significant is the great number of cases where punishment was merited or even threatened and afterwards lightened or remitted. It begins with Cain, that first great criminal, whom God dealt with leniently and compassionately (Gen. 4:9–15), or indeed with the first parents themselves, whose threatened punishment was lightened, with the promise of ultimate complete deliverance (Gen. 2:17; 3:1–19). And so all on down through the history, the attitude of God towards the bad man is not that of the impartial, inflexible judge, but on the other hand, as far as direct acts are concerned, He appears more often as mitigating some deserved punishment or ignoring offenses entirely and going right on in friendly help to the offending person.

Jacob did a very disgraceful and wicked act in deceiving his father to obtain a formal blessing (Gen. 27), and although we see that by the nemesis of nature it

was the cause of great suffering to him, yet God in His personal activity as pictured in the narrative does not take any notice of it at all. He allowed the blessing which the deceived father had pronounced to stand good, and confirmed it by the miraculous vision of the ladder (Gen. 28 : 12–17). This would be intolerable in a moral ruler, but in the movement of the history God is not acting as moral ruler at all, but entirely in the attitude of friend and partisan, and it is the fit office of a friend to continue his friendship and help irrespective of the character and acts of the one befriended.

He was his friend because Jacob had desired that friendship, and had been at pains to get himself made the heir of a special régime of friendship which God from the time of Abraham was bestowing specially on a specific line of persons (Gen. 25 : 31–34). It was to emphasize the importance and absoluteness of that compact of friendship that God for its sake entirely overlooked the faultiness of the man who had prized it and sought to have it. Instead of a blunder of the narrator this little incident really contains a miniature epitome of the gospel of salvation, namely, God befriending the unworthy who trust in Him.

God is not represented as making any hint of punishment when the brothers acted so cruelly to Joseph and deceived their father (Gen. 27 : 18–35) or when Simeon and Levi murdered so many innocent men at Shechem (Gen. 24 : 25–28). The story of the Danites' perfidy is given without any hint of punishment (Judg. 18 : 14–26). Rehoboam was saved from part of the disaster of his senseless tyranny for the sake of the

friendship to David (1 Kings 11 : 32). Manasseh was very cruel as well as apostate, but just as soon as he repented of his apostasy and looked to God he was forgiven and reinstated in favour (2 Chron. 33 : 12–13).

The Old Testament Gospel

Such and of such a nature is the story of God's dealings with men as recorded in the Old Testament. It is not the story of men slowly overcoming their faults and rising to higher levels of virtue. That is not what is portrayed nor what is intended. No more is it the story of a just and omniscient God watching over the conduct of men, punishing their sins and rewarding virtue. Sins are passed over in a way that would be inexplicable as the administration of a just moral ruler, and quite as often the virtuous and noble are allowed to meet with the severest trials. The intention must be to portray God in another light entirely.

The whole picture of God in His dealings both with good men and bad is that of a great wise friend using every means to build up a relation of friendship. With the bad He is lenient, forgiving if there is any plausible pretext, and ever seeking by warning and kindness to win them to better things. With the good He meets and associates in a most beautiful relation of congenial fellowship, which makes us feel that He can be to us also the sympathetic friend and confidant our hearts long for. He does not hold Himself aloof from any because of character or culture. Even for the doubtful, the weak, the rough and uncultured He has a service and freely gives them His companionship and confidence.

The picture is not a different one from that of the Gospels but the same. It is the same God with the same heart of patience and forbearance, ever yearning over His wayward friends, warning, encouraging, counselling, calling them back to the shelter of His care.

Really in some respects the Old Testament is a more practical gospel even than the New. The New Testament presents the grace of God in ideal form and on very much higher levels. But the Old Testament presents that same grace and kindness in homely operation among just the kind of dull, selfish, exasperating humanity that still makes up the great world of practical life. The New Testament is the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven but the Old Testament is that same gospel as it practically works out in this sordid old world in which most of us are still living.

PART III

The Christ

I

THE INCARNATION

WE now come to what has always been considered the most important part of the Bible, and unquestionably the center of our whole religious system. The New Testament gives a record of the life of Jesus. It records that after a life of something over thirty years He died on a cross, three days later rose alive from the grave, and soon ascended into heaven. It records that during the last three years of His life He went about the country preaching "The Kingdom of Heaven," healing the sick and doing other miraculous acts of kindness. It declares that this Jesus was a divine being, "The Son of God."

What meaning are we to give to this great event? How are we to coördinate it with all the rest that we have found in the Bible revelation of God? Of course we are taking the record at its face value just as it comes to us, and are accepting every claim that it makes as to the character and acts of Jesus.

It is one of the common mistakes of interpretation to try to confine the whole of a great event all to one formula. This event being such as it is represented to be is much too great to have only one meaning and one value. We may expect it to have many values and many meanings. And yet, while that is so, it is legiti-

mate to try to find what is the one most fundamental meaning, and what was the central purpose that caused it.

Its apparent meaning and value to us will vary according to the view-point from which we consider it. If we consider it from the view-point of our needs as sinners in a sin-cursed world we will call Jesus the Saviour, and consider His life and death a great sacrifice by which He redeemed us from death and secured for us Eternal Life.

This conception is unquestionably correct from that view-point. Jesus does save us from death and give us eternal life. He expected and intended to do so when He came into the world. To us that is a fact of immeasurable importance, and it is a fact that has the greatest efficiency in touching men's hearts and attracting them to Jesus. The Church is entirely right in making that the most conspicuous part of its great gospel appeal to the world. And we are right in making it the ground of supreme love and devotion to Jesus.

Anything we may say here must not be construed as implying that Jesus is not a Saviour, or that our Christianity is not to us a gospel of salvation from sin and death. But because that is the greatest value of the fact to us does not prove that it is necessarily the most important meaning of the fact itself intrinsically.

Certainly that cannot be counted its primary motive. We need hardly pause to remind ourselves again how impossible it would be to justify any such object as that as the primary motive of a supernatural act by God.

We have repeatedly noted that it would be inconsistent with God's infinite competence in His original great act of creation to conceive that He had to later interfere by a supernatural interposition to secure some improvement not originally provided for. Much more would it be so if it was to repair some ruin that had developed or restore something that had gone astray.

We must view this great fact in the light of all that went before it in that long working of this same God to which we give the name Evolution Process, and we must give it some interpretation and some purpose which is consistent with all the rest of that great process and an integral part of it.

The Fact of the Incarnation

From that point of view we must see that the most significant thing is the fact itself. The most important thing is the fact that God became man, that the infinite being who transcends our highest powers of thought placed Himself on the same plane and under the same limitations as one of the little creatures He had made. Not the Atonement but the Incarnation is the great pregnant fact which we must count as central. If we have gotten even a faint conception of the immeasurable greatness of God we will feel that this becoming man is such an exceedingly great fact as to overshadow everything else associated with it. The great fact of Christ is the Incarnation.

One reason that we have not heretofore been sufficiently impressed with the surpassing greatness of this fact is because in the traditional theology we have been

so dazed by the majesty of its setting that we have attempted to interpret it in terms that really did not contain it. We have said that the divine being merely took into union with Himself a human soul and body and caused it to go through the experiences of suffering and death that we saw in Jesus. This in itself would be an act of no great magnitude, and might be merely a minor item of the preparation for some greater work.

More recently we have come to feel that this does not fill the conditions represented, and under various names and theories we have begun to insist that in some way the divine being Himself became the man, and that the soul of this man was none else than the divine being Himself. But the complacency which we have inherited from the older conception is still strong upon us, and the enormous significance of this new meaning is slow in coming to full realization in our feelings.

Many men indeed, under the influence of the scientific conception of God's greatness, have been so impressed with that feature that they have felt unable to believe a real Incarnation, and so have challenged the divinity entirely. But the great body of Christians, while realizing that we must meet the problem of how it could be possible and what adequate and suitable reason there could be for such a fact, still insist that it did take place. If it did take place certainly it was an event of such immeasurable greatness that the fact itself must be considered the matter of chief significance, and from that standpoint we must seek its interpretation.

Possibility of the Incarnation

The problem of how such a thing as the Incarnation, God becoming man, could be possible, need give us no particular anxiety. While we can perhaps come no nearer solving it than we can any of the common problems of the genesis and growth of our own souls, yet it does not now present to our minds any of the contradictions that it seemed to present a generation ago. With the dogmatism of ignorance we used to make various rigid definitions of the nature of mind and soul, of such a character as to preclude the possibility of much that is implied in the Incarnation. Now with more wisdom we have come to realize that we do not know nearly as much as we supposed in regard to that matter.

Many recent discoveries and deductions in psychology have tended to very materially alter and expand our conceptions of the nature of soul or life and of what it can do. For instance, the familiar fact of ordinary generation, the soul or life of the child emanating from the soul or life of its parents, is really a fact which carries very radical implications as to the nature and possibilities of a soul.

Or take another fact of the same general import. We find that though there is a life-consciousness common to our whole body yet every separate cell of our body has such an independent endowment of life that it can continue to live, grow and execute its ordinary functions when completely severed from the body. This it can do not only when grafted into some other body but even entirely separate and alone.

Even more suggestive is the well-known phenomenon of "Multiple Personality," where a single man has two or more distinct streams of thought, consciousness and volition, as independent of each other apparently as if it were two distinct persons that were doing the acting and thinking.

These and other facts have seemed to demonstrate that soul or life is a very different kind of entity from what it was once supposed to be. Consciousness and personality are not the very essence of the soul, as they were formerly assumed to be. Not only can a single soul develop into various kinds of plurality, but the same soul or life is capable of simultaneously carrying on within itself two or more streams or syntheses of consciousness independent of each other. The soul is a great efficient something, and it has ability to carry on acts and to effect or experience consciousness, but neither the acts nor the consciousness are the essence of the soul itself. They are both alike merely functions, or things that it does. And the same soul may have going on at the same time two or more, not only of the streams of acts but of the streams of consciousness as well.

Such facts as these have led us to see the danger of negative dogmatism. They have made us see that the nature of the soul or mind, and its capability may be something far greater and more versatile than we had supposed. They have made us feel that it may not be at all impossible for an infinite divine mind to function in a variety of different forms and different capacities, indeed in as many manners and forms as it may choose.

For that is what we must consider that Incarnation would be. It would be *the mind of God functioning within the limitations, capacities and experiences usual to an ordinary human mind.* It does not mean changing His substance and becoming composed of other substance. It does not necessarily mean His ceasing to be all that He was before or ceasing to carry on all the other functions that He was carrying on before. Nor would it mean His adding anything, as He certainly had before all the capacities that a human mind has.

We need not profess to explain and define the method of the Incarnation, but we may entirely dismiss all thought of impossibility or contradictoriness in connection with it. Many things that we already know of the nature of mind point directly towards its possibility and there is nothing that really contradicts it. The fact itself we may perhaps define as follows:— The infinite being God not only inhabiting and operating a physical body like that of a man but also with a consciousness located there feeling all the sensations and experiences that a man experiences, and thinking, perceiving, willing and acting with the same measure of capacity as an ordinary man possesses. All this of course with a feeling of perfect sympathy and brotherliness towards other men.

This is what we may consider Jesus to have been, and this is what we may define Incarnation to mean. It must at least have been something the equivalent of that, for Jesus emphatically declared, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and at the same time

He was always emphasizing the fact that He was "The Son of Man."

Purpose of the Incarnation

The next question is as to the reason for the Incarnation. If God thus became a man why did He do it? What place had such an act in His great perfect scheme of universe building? What is its place in God's great evolution scheme? There is really the fundamental problem. That is the one crucial question in connection with the Incarnation. We cannot conceive of God doing such an act without a sufficient reason, and what reason could be sufficient for such an act as that?

We may say at once that the producing purpose was not the Atonement. It was not done primarily as a preparation for atoning for men's sins. That is not at all implying that the atonement is not true. It is not saying that atonement and sacrifice did not result as a necessary consequence of that incarnation. But that was not the formal and fundamental purpose of it. We cannot believe that such a purpose could produce such an act, or indeed any supernatural act. We have already a number of times considered this same question. We could not conceive of God doing a supernatural act primarily in order to restore anything or repair anything or to supply any need or deficiency in the results of ordinary evolution.

The purpose of the Incarnation was precisely the same purpose as that of all the supernatural in the Old Testament. It was just a great act of fellowship. It

was merely God carrying out fully His purpose to engage in fellowship with men. It was really an act which belongs in the same series with all those Old Testament acts, merely the culmination and most perfect one of all those acts, all having the same purpose and the same meaning. Its object and meaning was the complete inauguration of fellowship between God and men, a purpose which, as we have seen, seems to be the natural culmination of the whole evolution process.

It is simply God doing in perfect degree what He had partially done in all the Old Testament supernatural, namely, meeting with men on the plane of perfect fellowship, thus fully inaugurating that new step in the evolution progress by inviting and drawing men into a state of fellowship with Himself.

With such an interpretation the Incarnation becomes luminous with meaning. All the other things that result from it, such as the atonement, the teaching and the ethical example, fall naturally into their logical place, and all the difficulties with regard to it entirely disappear. It is the natural and fitting culmination of God's one great universe act.

Its Place in the Evolution Scheme

All down through the cycling ages God had been leisurely carrying on an enterprise of evolution by which He finally produced a race of beings capable of engaging in fellowship with Himself. With the dawn of Bible history He is seen beginning that fellowship with them. The Old Testament records the earlier,

tentative advances. There were occasionally at long intervals acts of (supernatural) kindness and friendliness to individuals and to one selected nation. Along with this there was also a continuous fellowship of conversation with them through the prophets and inspired men. All this was a true intercourse of fellowship, though somewhat veiled and reserved.

But we must believe that whatever God undertakes to do He will ultimately do in the most complete and effective degree possible. If He has proposed to bestow fellowship upon men we may expect that in due time He will bestow a fellowship that is the fullest and most complete kind possible.

The fullest and most complete kind of fellowship He could bestow would be for Himself to become a man, stand on the same level side by side with other men, sharing all their experiences and giving them all the outflow of sympathy and friendship that perfect love could bestow. That would be the complete bestowal of perfect fellowship.

That is precisely what in the person of Jesus Christ He did. And that purpose is one that gives us an entirely adequate and appropriate reason for the Incarnation. That is what we must believe the Incarnation and the life of Jesus Christ really mean. And therein we see that, instead of being abnormal, incredible and contrary to science, this Incarnation of God is something that not only religion but the evolution process in its highest interpretation actually calls for, and evolution could not have its highest culmination without it.

Fellowship Always Specific and Limited

If we are to interpret the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ entirely as an act of fellowship then we must expect that, like all the Old Testament acts of fellowship, it shall strictly conform to the rules and essential conditions of fellowship. One of these, as we have seen, is that fellowship is a personal thing and restricted in its bestowal to specific persons. It is not a general benevolence available to all that will take it, but must be specifically limited and bestowed on some definite individual or group. It might seem at first that in Jesus' case there was an exception to this, as we believe Him to be the Saviour of the world with no restrictions to His love and grace.

That is certainly true of the results of His life, and it is true that He offers fellowship now to any one anywhere who will come,—personally and individually,—and accept His fellowship. And yet when we consider the historical fact, the actual earthly life itself and the acts of Jesus, we find there is no exception there to the rule. It all conforms to this law of fellowship, precisely as all the other fellowship acts of the Old Testament did.

Jesus' fellowship was not bestowed upon the world at large. It was distinctly restricted and was all actually confined to one party, to the same party that had been the recipient of all the Old Testament fellowship, the party that God had established a special bond of pledged fellowship with. To the Syro-Phœnician woman Jesus said:—"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). We have

no right to think that Jesus did not know what He was saying or did not mean what He said.

This saying which we have often made such strenuous efforts to explain away is really a very important and fundamental one. The principle here stated is confirmed by an examination of all His recorded life. He did confine His work and His fellowship to that nation, and never went out of it for work. Even when some Greeks,—men of another nation,—came to Him in Jerusalem and wished to meet Him it required quite an amount of planning to get the audience, and it called out in Jesus some of His deepest reflections as being an unusual event (John 12:20 ff.).

He loved all people in all the world, and desired to have fellowship with them all every one. And this incarnate life and fellowship He was now giving He hoped would eventually bring men from all nations to seek and accept that fellowship. But the life and the acts themselves, if they were to be real fellowship and not merely benevolence and charity, must be given to those with whom there was a distinct bond of relation and fellowship, namely, this Jewish nation.

It was when He should be "lifted up" and this act of fellowship closed, that all men should be drawn to Him, and of course none that come to Him would ever be turned away. He would open up a relation of friendship and fellowship with each and every one of those that sought it,—personally and one by one. But that is an entirely different matter from this act in which He had "come down" and on His own part from His own side unasked, bestowed fellowship. In

that case He bestowed only upon a people to whom He had long sustained a relation of plighted friendship, a relation that distinctly justified and called for the bestowal of friendly fellowship.

It was because this coming of Jesus as a supernatural act was under the same restrictions and conditions in this respect as all the other supernatural acts that it also was limited to this group with whom God was carrying on the relation of fellowship, namely, Israel, and was not directed in general to any and every nation, though the results of His coming, as indeed the results of all the other Old Testament supernatural acts, were eventually to benefit all the world.

The Personality of Jesus

If the meaning we are to see in Jesus is a revelation of God, and the object is fellowship, then the most important thing in the Gospels is not the sermon on the mount or the great theological discourses in John. The most important thing in the Gospels is Jesus Himself. We read the Gospels not to know what Jesus taught but to know Jesus. Far more important than anything He said or did is the sight of Him saying and doing, and the touch of the divine heart that lay behind the words and deeds. It is the personality rather than the product that is important.

Not doctrines about His person but to really know Him as a person, not analysis of His character but really to come into contact with Him as friend with friend and let that character have its influence upon us, that is the way we really get the intended benefit

of the Gospels. The art critic who should critically examine the canvas, learn the chemical composition of all the colours and the mathematical dimensions of all the lines and shapes, but fail to see that it is a picture and be touched by its beauty, has not gotten the highest value out of his subject.

To really come into touch with Jesus and get the full influence that the gospel picture was intended to afford, we must put out of mind all the psychological problems about infinite God becoming man, and the theological problems of His nature. We must forget for the time all about Atonement, and not even let the consciousness of His divinity obtrude too much into our thoughts. We must look upon Him purely as a man. For that was what the whole event was, namely, God becoming *man*, and if we fail to feel Him absolutely a man we fail of the very object God was at such infinite pains to secure. If it was worth God's while to take all the pains to become a man, surely it is worth our while frankly and fully to consider Him a man and meet with Him as a man.

In all His relations He was genuinely a man. He lived His life not in any official capacity, except as every man's heart and the Spirit of God in him will mark out a beckoning path of service. Even after He began His public work it was the heart of the honest carpenter that still beat within Him and that went out in understanding sympathy to all with whom He mingled.

His most intimate disciples seem all to have been from the labouring classes, though doubtless many just

as sincere and earnest could have been obtained from more educated circles, and one such man, Paul, did have to be found later outside the twelve to be the doctrinal interpreter of the new faith. Various reasons have been suggested for this, but we seem usually to entirely overlook the most obvious reason, namely, that Jesus Himself was a labouring man. Men of that class would naturally be more congenial to Him and He to them. We must not suppose that the tastes and feelings that rule other men were absent from Him. As well suppose that He was not man at all as to suppose that in any essential respect He was not the same kind of man that any other man in His circumstances would have been.

The Model Friend

There are a number of things in the record which are very difficult to account for on any other theory of the meaning of Christ's coming which are not only easily explainable but very instructive as well if we realize that the whole movement was a matter of offered friendship and fellowship by God to men.

One of these difficult things is Judas. His relations to Judas cannot be accounted for as merely a mistake growing out of the human limitations of Jesus. Jesus never was mistaken in the character of Judas. We are plainly told that He read his character from the beginning (John 6 : 64). His defection was not a sudden emotional break merely, for he had long been dishonest (John 12 : 6). To imagine that Jesus distinctly chose him for the purpose of having one of His disciples be-

tray Him, in order to fulfill prophecy or something of that kind, would be to make the whole matter too much like merely a melodramatic suicide.

Jesus chose Judas on the same ground that He chose all the others, namely, that he eagerly responded to His appeal for friendship by trust. That was the one thing He preëminently wanted. True his was not fully the kind of trust He wanted, nor was that of any of the others at first. None of them had at first either the character or the beliefs He wished them to have, and it is quite possible that Judas averaged up fairly well with the others in that respect.

The important thing is that the whole matter was on the plane of friendship and governed by the rules that apply to friendship. He expected to eventually win the world not chiefly by logic or learning but by the drawing power of friendship and sympathy. And so friendship was the one criterion by which He chose His disciples, those who were to be His representatives and carry on the work after He was gone.

Having once given His friendship the bond could only be broken by the other party. He would never withdraw it once given. The record is that "Having loved . . . He loved unto the end" (John 13 : 1), Judas being implicitly included. Whether or not He still had hope of being able to reform Judas, at any rate He was too much of a man of honour and too true a friend to withdraw for any cause a pledged friendship once given. And the same thing is equally true to-day. The only thing that will ever put any man outside the circle of Jesus' friends is for him himself to break or

repudiate the bond of friendship. Jesus will never do it no matter how great the provocation. There is as great a lesson in Judas as in "the thief on the cross."

There are many indications that all the disciples were rather heart friends than critically selected apprentices. They were all merely men of His own class and social level, who, partly for that reason, had made a whole-hearted response to the appeal of His friendship. That was the one thing He wanted, and He was willing to rest His cause on that rather than on scholarship, eloquence or political power.

He apparently aimed to influence His disciples rather by His personality than by His words, otherwise how can we account for it that not till they had been with Him more than a year did they come to the full realization of His divinity (Matt. 16 : 13 ff.), a truth that He was much rejoiced to have them feel and which He surely could have fully proved to them inside of a week by teaching if it had been His plan to do it that way. As it was He said it came to them through the heart, directly through contact with the divine spirit.

The whole picture is the picture of a friend bestowing the riches of His divinely precious fellowship upon a chosen circle of friends, that they might go out to the world with the glow of that friendship upon them, to thereby attract others into the circle of the same precious fellowship. That is the way His cause has always won its converts and the way it is winning them to-day,—by the touch of Christ-filled lives rather than by the pressure of logic and scientific "Christian evidences."

Not that His words are not a rich storehouse of profitable teaching. Of course there were wise sayings, profitable advice and deep theological truths given in His conversations with His disciples and others. He would not be a true friend if He did not, since He could, put much profitable conversation into His fellowship with them. He could not otherwise have given them that full outflow of His heart which fellowship implies. He was purer and more spiritual than other men, and the stores of profitable truth were there and must come out if He spoke at all.

But if He was speaking just for the sake of revealing truths how can we account for it that He never committed a single truth He had revealed to permanent written record, and made no provision for having it done? Nor was there any attempt made apparently to put on record a single word that He had spoken for many years after He had gone away.

More than that, though for three years He was constantly busy teaching, preaching and talking to people, and probably if all He spoke were written it would be enough to fill hundreds of volumes, yet of all His divine words we have left preserved to us less all told than could be easily spoken in three or four hours' time.

This is all quite unaccountable except on the one principle that it was not the intrinsic value of the truths taught that was the important thing so much as the social touch with Him the speaker. His words and speaking were of value chiefly as means to reveal Him Himself.

Dislike for Publicity

Another very strange fact is His command to His disciples not to tell the people that He was the expected Christ (Matt. 16 : 20). If He was the expected Christ, and the success of His mission depended on His being accepted as such, why does He forbid His disciples to frankly tell the people that He is so? What explanation can we give of this except that He considered the influence of His personality at that stage far more important than right beliefs as to the nature of His person? And He knew that the agitation of their thoughts over the knowledge of *who* He was would interfere with their receiving the quiet, deep influences of His personality. To try to look at the sun blinds our eyes. We get the most benefit by just letting its light shine about us.

When the Pharisees asked Him to show them a sign from heaven and they would believe His claims to be the Messiah (Mark 8 : 11, 12; John 6 : 20, etc.), He refused. Why did He refuse? The working of miracles was an every-day occurrence with Him. Why not work one now? It is quite possible that they would have been as good as their word and have formally acknowledged Him as the Messiah if He had complied with their test and done a suitable miracle. Why does He refuse such a natural test when the working of miracles was such a constant part of His every-day work?

Equally strange is another similar fact, His constant reluctance to display His miracles and frequent direct attempts to conceal them. He frequently commands

the person healed not to tell any one of his healing (cf. Matt. 8 : 4, etc.). He leads or sends others away in order that the healing may be in private and away from the public observation (Mark 8 : 23 ; John 9 : 7, etc.). Why did He do so ?

He Himself recognizes and appeals to His miracles as affording proof of His divinity (John 10 : 38 ; 14 : 11, etc.), and yet He all the time seems to wish to hide them and keep them private, as though they were a burden and He wished He did not have to be discommoded by them.

We have been accustomed to say it was because the success of His miracles increased the envy of His enemies and hastened His death, and He wished to prolong His time for teaching. But this is hardly a sufficient or a satisfactory answer.

The true reason was that He had come from heaven and become man expressly that He might meet men in fellowship on their own level, and He grudged everything that tended to make Him seem different from them. He had such a heart of sympathy that He could not help healing suffering men whenever they appealed to Him, but He constantly felt the price He had to pay in that condition of specialness which it raised up as a barrier between Him and the hearts of those with whom He met and whom He wished to touch as brothers.

He wanted not the wonder and admiration of men but their confiding affection. He wanted the same feeling they had for the human friend that was most near to them. Everything that made Him seem different from other men by just so much made more

difficult that relation of familiar, homely affection. He could have inspired wonder and admiration as God in heaven, and did so in Old Testament times. The other —the homely affection,—He considered so important that it was worth leaving heaven and becoming man to obtain it.

The mediæval Church entirely missed this truth. They fixed their gaze so constantly on the divinity as to miss entirely the feeling of this humanity He considered so important, and as a result had to bring in the virgin mother and the saints to supply this void their mistake had made. We even yet have not entirely recovered from that mistake. We are accustomed to think of Jesus' ministry as consisting of only the three years of His itinerancy. Future generations may come to know Him more fully as He wished to be known. They may realize what He became man for, and to them His thirty years in the Nazareth carpenter shop may bring quite as much soul comfort and strength as the three years of His harassed publicity.

Jesus' Miracles

The Incarnation itself is the supreme miracle, but the life of Jesus also presents many cases of specific miracles. Indeed so great is their number that they dominate the story, and we have very little account of the acts of Jesus that do not have something of the miraculous about them.

If the great miracle of the Incarnation is true we need not stop to justify the occurrence of these specific miracles. Accepting them as they are recorded we

shall only ask, What is their meaning? What is their purpose? What is their value?

Various answers are given. They are the proof of the divinity of Christ. They are to attest the truth of the doctrines He taught and the salvation He promised. They are to give us confidence to trust Him by seeing His power and what He did. All of these answers and others may be true without yet being the true answer as to what the meaning of the miracles is.

To get the true answer we must consider two or three separate aspects. We must consider not only what good resulted from them. That is one meaning. Another question is, What was God's purpose in them? Still another is, What was their genesis in the mind of Christ?

These last two questions are not the same. Jesus was a man and thought and wished as a man. To Jesus His miracles were a burden because they interfered with the great passion and pleasure of His life, which was to get near to men and feel their familiar affection. God's Spirit saw a value in their occurrence that outweighed the disadvantages they brought in this respect, so God allowed that they should be done. And yet the cause in Jesus' mind that brought them about was not this wider advantage they would bring but something else.

The cause that produced them practically every one was pure human sympathy. It was the passion to help men and relieve their sufferings. Jesus fully realized the purpose which in God's plan the miracles served. He knew they really did prove His divinity and attest His authority. "Believe the works that ye may know that the Father is in me" (John 10 : 38). "The works

that I do bear witness that the Father hath sent me" (John 5 : 36). Once in the very act of doing the miracle He called attention to its evidential value. "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins . . . arise and go unto thy house" (Matt. 9 : 6). But even so that was not the primary purpose that prompted His miracles. Neither in this one nor in any of the others was the cause that led Him to do the miracle its teaching or evidential value. We know this because He positively refused to do a miracle for a sign.

The motive that prompted Him was pure sympathy responding to the appeals of distress. It is the same motive that prompts the mother to give help in response to the moans of her sick babe. To give the help does prove that she has mother love, and that she is good and kind. But she does not do it for that purpose,—to evidence those things. If she did do it intentionally to evidence those things that fact would seriously impair its value as evidence of those very things. If you do a kind deed purposely to show that you are kind it does not show that you are kind at all,—merely that you are vain. So all Jesus' miracles were purely the result of His human sympathy responding to the appeal of distress and of trust,—an appeal that He never found Himself able to resist. And it is because they were so that they have such evidential value.

The Miracles Proof of Jesus' Humanity

It has always been considered that the miracles of Jesus prove His divinity. But if we will think more

deeply we will see that much more do they prove His humanity.

We have seen that all the miracles of Jesus were merely the natural result of His sympathy on seeing suffering and need. He saw a suffering sick man, His sympathy was touched and His kind heart responded with the impulse to do all He could to help him. Having the power of God at His disposal He could, so He did, entirely heal such persons.

But if, as we believe, Jesus is really God, one with the Father and the expression of His character, God's heart must be the same as the heart of Jesus. God the Father must feel the same sympathy for that suffering one and the same desire to relieve and heal him as Jesus did. Why then does He not do it? God sees now the millions of suffering men all over the world. He has the same sympathy and same strong desire to relieve them that we saw in Jesus. Why then does He allow them to go on in suffering instead of performing a miracle and healing them as Jesus did?

The reason is because with His infinite view of all the universe and of all time He can see decisive reasons why it is best for nature to have its way and the suffering run its normal course. Jesus did not have that wide view and that knowledge. In all the view that was open to His consciousness there was only the appeal and pity urging Him to help and nothing to offset it. And so He always did heal when the appeal came.

It was that which made the difference. The heart was the same in both, and there was the same purpose

to do the best in view of all the facts in sight. And yet when He and the Father both looked at the same suffering, and both had the same pity and the same strong desire to give relief, Jesus does heal and the Father does not. And the reason is because Jesus is human, bound only by the laws of human responsibilities and seeing only with the measure of human knowledge, while the Father must see and act from the view-point of the whole universe and eternity.

If we wish for a definition then we may say that the miracles of Jesus are the product of divine power placed at the disposal of human knowledge and human interests. They show us *how God would act if He saw things as we see them.* They are therefore the best possible revelation to us of the heart of God, for they show us His heart not engaged with the problems of infinity and eternity, which would be entirely unintelligible to us, but show us His heart as it would be in our environment and facing our problems, so doing things we can understand.

It is quite appropriate then that the recorded life of Jesus should be found so full of miraculous acts. Those very miracles are the proof, as they are the result, of His true humanity. But more than that, they reveal to us the heart of God as nothing else could reveal it, and enable us to understand it and feel it as no other way of revealing it could do. They are therefore just the acts best adapted to make us really know God and thus make us desire to come into fellowship with Him. And that was the supreme purpose Jesus had in becoming man.

II

ATONEMENT

THERE remains still one more very interesting problem. Under that conception of religion and of Christ's mission which we are following here what shall we say about what is usually called "Atonement"? What was Christ's relation to the sins of the world?

If God assumes the personality of a man and stands among us sharing all the ordinary experiences of life, He must in that capacity come in contact with sin. In that case what must be His attitude towards it? In what relation will He stand to the sinful men on account of it, or what will be the results of His coming in contact with it in that capacity?

We may say at once that He will not in that capacity meet sin as judge to inflict punishment upon it. True this person who is incarnate is God and is the same being that was the creator and is the moral ruler of the world. Moreover it is distinctly declared that He is the same one who in the end shall pronounce judgment upon all men. But we are considering now this one specific enterprise or project for which He has come into the world. In this specific enterprise for which He became incarnate He does not meet sin and the sinner as judge at all (John 5:45; 8:15). That belongs to another enterprise and another department

of His activity entirely. As incarnate and come for fellowship God's attitude will not be that of the punisher of sin.

And we may also say that His primary aim and purpose will not be the task of freeing us from the pollution of sin and giving us power to overcome it, even though most important help does come to us from Him in that respect. That, as we have seen, is right in line with the very essence of God's evolution process which He is carrying on in nature, so it could not be the primary purpose in this special personal enterprise.

His purpose in becoming incarnate did not have any relation to sin in any way primarily. It did have practically most vital and important relation to sin, but it was all as a secondary matter and an indirect result.

Love His Supreme Motive

His one fundamental purpose in all the incarnate life was fellowship, and all His attitudes and relations must have been such as would grow out of that. The ruling motive of all His incarnate life must have been that which is the characteristic exercise of fellowship, namely, kindness, friendship and love.

By love we mean real human affection,—all that the warmest friendship between close friends is. Not some austere and exalted religious emotion, but this very human and very commonplace thing, affectionate friendship.

Too often we look to everything else but that for the motive of His life. We see a prophet revealing the thoughts of God. We see a great perfect example.

We see the spirit of a martyr willing to die to fulfill a great trust laid upon Him.

He did indeed do and feel all those things, but they were all quite secondary to the one great motive of His life, which was love,—the common kind of love,—the thing that makes our friends dear to us.

If love was the supreme passion and motive of His life His attitude towards sin must be conditioned by that. His relation to sin and to the sinner must be that which is appropriate to love and that which would be produced by love. If His one purpose in coming was to be a great friend to man we can expect Him to do anything that is the proper province of friendship,—everything that love implies.

Love in contact with sinful men would want to do everything it could to make them better. It would warn, teach, persuade them and try to set such an example before them as would spontaneously lead them to right living, and it would want to give them direct help by the power of God's Spirit in their hearts, to achieve the better life. And so we see that Jesus would become the great Teacher, as He has always been conceived to be, and the great example inspiring men to higher things. And we see also that special help to uplift, rescue or reform him, might ordinarily be expected to be received by any man, along with other good gifts, when he entered into the fellowship of that love.

Love Begets Suffering

But there is one other attitude that a friend may have towards his sinful friend. There is one other

thing that he may do, indeed that he must do and cannot avoid doing if he is really a friend. There is something that is commonly overlooked as an office of friendship, but in this case it is the most important of all, and the key to the whole situation. *He may suffer for the sins of his friend.* Indeed in as far as he is truly a friend he cannot avoid so suffering.

Not only when the sin and offense is against himself will he suffer directly from the offense itself. That is not all. In all cases he suffers. He suffers pain and shame for the unworthiness of his friend. But still more significant, he suffers directly through sympathy with his friend the evil and shame which the sin brings upon that friend.

Love may be defined from various view-points, but from one view-point it certainly has this meaning of "sympathy" or "feeling with" the person loved. If you love a person very much you will feel the thrill of any joy and the pain of any suffering you see him experiencing, almost or quite as much as though you were experiencing it yourself.

This then is a natural and inevitable attitude of friendship towards the sins of a friend. By virtue of his friendship he suffers for those sins, for it is the very essence of friendship and love to make him suffer on account of them.

It is this that forms the true essence of what we call the Atonement. In a far more true and literal sense than even the older theology conceived, Christ did really bear the sins of men and really suffer for those sins.

It was not merely in some mysterious "forensic" sense,—some technical legal relation. Christ had the iniquity of men laid upon Him and endured the penalty of that sin in the most literal sense, and moreover in a way that we are very familiar with in our own lives. He could not fail to do so if love was the passion of His life, and if love meant the same with Him as it does with us. A perfect love coupled with a perfect knowledge would feel the penalty of the other man's sins just as much as the man himself did. Indeed would feel it far more, for He would know far better than the man himself the shamefulness of his sins and the ruin it was working both in the world and in his own soul.

One of the serious mistakes of that older theology was its teaching of "The Impassibility of God,"—that it was impossible for Him to suffer, that His existence was always and altogether wrapped in the most perfect and placid felicity. On the contrary we might almost say that God is the greatest sufferer in the universe,—that He suffers as much as all the universe together. For wherever there is suffering experienced by any one His perfect heart of love feels it just as much as the person concerned.

This does not of course mean that God is crippled and crushed under an agony of pain. God's infinite powers are so great that all that vast amount of suffering may be comparatively only like one atom in the immensity of His infinite life. Nevertheless He does bear and feel it all. And one of the effects of Christ coming to earth incarnate was to let us see how much

He feels it,—let us see how great it is, by letting us see its effect upon Him when He was not thus sustained by infinite power. We shall see that it was this suffering for the sins of men and not the nails of the cross that was really the actual cause of Christ's death.

The Atonement thus is something that necessarily results from God's relation of love and fellowship with men. It is a natural and inevitable result of that fellowship. It is the essential attitude of God's love. He had before that same love and that same feeling, but the Incarnation by exhibiting the life of God in human proportions enables us for the first time to recognize and see it clearly.

That suffering from men's sins is not merely a detached act, not merely a program that Jesus went through. It is simply His nature,—God's nature,—expressing itself, and it appears somewhat wherever God appears personally and specially to men. It is more or less the undertone of all the Old Testament revelation of God. The story of the Atonement is not something exclusively confined to the closing chapters of the four Gospels. Atonement, pain, suffering over the sins of men He loves, colours the whole picture of God in all the Bible, Old Testament as well as New.

Atonement

We need not attempt here to show what meaning this fact of Christ's suffering thus would have in the moral government of the world, and how it might contribute to make it possible that God could pass over sins without punishing them, as though they had been

expiated. That is a matter rather for Systematic Theology. Still we may notice that our forgiveness could not have come without the suffering, for the fellowship and love which brings us forgiveness was the condition which caused that suffering and death. That was the price He had to pay if we were to be loved and forgiven. He could not love us and receive us as friends without that suffering. In that sense we may say He had to die if we were to come into fellowship with Him and He with us, and thus we could say that His death purchased our redemption from punishment and death.

He really made His life a sacrifice for sin (Isa. 53:10), for it was sin, the sins of men, that crushed out that life and caused His death. Not merely that Pilate and the Jews in their wickedness nailed Him to the cross and killed Him. That has come to seem in these days altogether too artificial and far fetched a ground for a world salvation. It was not the soldiers' hammer and nails that wrought the miracle of the redemption of the world.

Bare six hours on the cross was not enough in itself to cause His death, as Pilate by his wonder testifies (Mark 15:44). Especially is that plain when we consider all the particulars. Something else aside from the nail wounds was a factor and a main factor in bringing the end, as has always been recognized. We know that mental suffering can produce death, and all the recorded circumstances seem to indicate that He died from some form of acute mental agony rather than the physical wounds. The intense agony in Geth-

semane also proves that there was something else at work besides the mere bodily wounds.

Love Produced His Death

We need not be at a loss to divine what that something was. We know of this pain and suffering through sympathy over men's sins which was pressing upon Him all the time, of such intensity that the only wonder is that it had not taken His life long before. Doubtless it would have done so but for the divine help and strength acquired during many long night vigils of prayer alone on the mountains.

It was His love, so great as to make Him feel the pangs of all our pains and sins which made the burden that ceaselessly pressed upon Him, and which won Him the title of the "Man of Sorrows." We may not be able to enter fully into the psychology of His experiences, and know just how far during His life He could see the sins of men and feel their pains. Doubtless He could only see with a man's capacity and feel in proportion. Human strength could not have endured the load a single moment if His love had been able to see the sins of all the world and fully feel its pain. He saw as a man the griefs and sins of all the men around Him that He knew and loved, and that was a sufficient load for Him to bear then. As He advanced in His ministry, came in contact with more men, and especially as He saw more clearly their wickedness and felt the pang of it, the sorrow deepened more and more upon Him.

Something at the end made a sudden access of that pain too great for the measure of human strength to

bear, and it crushed out His life. It may have been that just at the end His mind was somehow miraculously opened to know and feel the sins of all men, with its terrible weight of pain and shame. But we are not shut up necessarily to such an explanation. The natural circumstances would seem to be quite sufficient. That terrible saturnalia of sin and blasphemy through which He was dragged just at the end would seem to furnish a sufficient cause. Especially since we know that He had a deep and tender love for each one even of those men that were so raving in blasphemy and hate.

It is hard for us to realize that He could have really loved all those men who were hounding Him to death, —loved them so deeply that He felt their sin and shame as though it were His own. Yet we know that He did thus love them and must have suffered intensely from it all. What would a father feel to see his one dearly loved son so debase and debauch himself? Multiply that pain by the hundreds that Jesus saw thus debauching themselves, and remember that His love was far deeper and more constant than even that of a father for an erring boy. All this in addition to the ever-increasing load of the same kind that He was already bearing, and is it any wonder that the strain became too great and His life gave way?

That intense agony in the garden the night before,— it was the anticipation of this that caused that agony, not the fear of death or physical wounds. What to Him was the little suffering of the nails in His flesh compared to this suffering of love?

But the pain became too great for human strength to bear. He bowed His head upon the cross and yielded up His life. Sin had done its worst but His love remained constant. And His Father glorified Him and endued Him again with His divine strength.

That is the real meaning of Jesus, the Son of God come down to earth to enter our fellowship and win us to be His friends. He has not finished a task and gone away. It was not a task but a fellowship. And though unseen He is still as truly now as then, " with us always."

He has just the same love and sympathy now as then, only now He has infinite power to sustain the load. He has still the same desire to bestow love and fellowship that brought Him here at first, and the same heart yearning for us to come unto Him that He may love us and help us and be our friend.

Let us not stop to question what it is that saves us from punishment and brings forgiveness of sins. Let us just look upon Him as He is, feeling the hurt and shame of all our sins, because He loves us, yet loving us still with all our sins, and holding out His hands to us in love, saying " Come Unto Me."

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